

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a modern building's interior. It features a dark, curved staircase with a glass railing, set against a backdrop of large windows that let in bright, warm light. The overall color palette is dominated by deep reds, oranges, and browns, creating a sophisticated and artistic atmosphere.

米澤穂信

Honobu Yonezawa

氷菓

The niece of time

角川文庫

1 - Letter from Benares

Dear Houtarou,

I am currently staying in Benares. Although in Japan this place is commonly known as Benares, calling it Varanasi is probably more accurate in terms of pronunciation.

Benares is a great town, Houtarou. This is a town of funeral ceremonies - after all, it has been since a long time ago. It seems like whoever dies here can ascend directly to heaven. Or am I wrong?

Oh yes, this place is said to be "free from the wheel of reincarnation." What it means is that dying here is equivalent to becoming an enlightened being in the Buddhist sense. In China, a long austerity is required to reach this state of "release". But here you simply pass away and then everything is okay.

Well, that's a pathetic story for the Chinese.

It might be a bit late, but congratulations for being successfully admitted into high school. It is Kamiyama High School after all, isn't it? What a boring choice. But congratulations anyway.

As your big sis, let me give you, someone who has safely become a high school student, a piece of advice.

Enter the Classics Club.

The Classics Club is a humanities club in Kami-High with a long tradition. Also, you might already know this, but I also belonged to the club in the past.

I heard this from someone else, but it seems that our tradition-rich club has had no newcomers for three years and currently has no members at all. If no one joins the club this year it will be disbanded. As a former member of the club it is certainly not something I can stand.

However, if there are newcomers in April then the situation will turn out differently. Houtarou, safeguard the Classics Club, the youth of your big sis. For now you can join the club in name only.

Moreover, it's not really that bad of a club. It's particularly great in autumn. After all, you don't have anything better to do, do you?

I'll call you after reaching New Delhi.

With love,
Tomoe



2 - The Rebirth of the Traditional Classics Club

It's often said that life in high school is rose-coloured. As the year 2000 comes to an end, the arrival of the day that matches that description as defined by a Japanese dictionary isn't too far off.

However, that doesn't mean that all high school students would wish for such a rose-coloured life. Whether it's studying, sports or romance, there will always be some people who would prefer a grey-coloured life rather than all that; I know quite a few within my own reckoning. Still, it's quite a lonely way to live one's life.

Here I was striking up a conversation of such a topic with my old friend Fukube Satoshi in the classroom filled with the light of the sunset. As always, Satoshi would carry a smiling face and say, "That's what I thought as well. By the way, I never knew you were so masochistic."

How unfortunately wrong he was. So I protested, "Are you saying my life is grey-coloured?"

"Did I say that? But Houtarou, whether it's studying, sports, or what was the other one? Romance? I don't think you've ever been forward-looking in any of those."

"I'm not exactly backward-looking either."

"Well, true,"

Satoshi's smile broadened.

"You're just 'saving energy' after all."

I gave my approval to that with a snort. It's fine as long as you understand that I don't exactly hate getting myself active. I simply dislike wasting energy on anything bothersome. My style is to save energy for the betterment of the planet. In other words, "If I don't have to do it, I won't. If I have to do it, make it quick."

As I utter my motto, Satoshi would shrug his shoulders as usual.

"Whether it's energy saving or cynicism, it's the same thing, isn't it? Have you ever heard of instrumentalism^[1]?"

"Nope."

"In short, it means that for a person like you who has no particular interest, just by observing the fact that you have not joined any club here in Kamiyama High, the Holy Land of high school club activities, makes you a grey-coloured person."

"What? Are you saying death from murder is no different from death from negligence?"

Satoshi answered without hesitation, "From a certain perspective, yeah. Though it's a different matter completely if you're trying to convince a dead person that his death is due to your negligence in order to exorcise his soul."

"..."

Cheeky bastard. I once again looked at the person before me. Fukube Satoshi, my old friend, worthy opponent and deadly rival, is rather short for a guy. Even as a high school student, he could be mistaken as a feminine-looking weakling, but he's totally different on the inside. It's quite difficult to explain just what that difference is — anyway, he just feels different. Besides carrying a smile all the time, he's always seen with a drawstring bag, as well as his trademark cheekiness. He's also a member of the Handicraft Club, don't ask me why.

Arguing with him is just a waste of energy. I waved my hand to signify the end of this conversation.

"Yeah, whatever. Just go home already."

"Yeah, you're right. I haven't got any club activities today... maybe I'll go home."

As Satoshi stretched his waist, he suddenly realized something and looked at me.

"'Go home already'? That's rare hearing that from you."

"What is?"

"If it's going home, wouldn't you usually have done so before even uttering that sentence? Just what business would you have after school when you aren't affiliated with any clubs?"

"Ah."

I raised my eyebrow and took out a piece of paper from the inner right pocket of my uniform jacket. After quietly handing it to Satoshi, his eyes widened in amazement. No, he's overreacting. It's not like he's really

surprised, though it's true that his eyes have widened. Satoshi is well-known for such exaggerated reactions after all.

"What?! How can this be?!"

"Satoshi, behave yourself."

"Isn't this a club application form? I'm surprised. Just what on earth has happened? For Houtarou to actually join a club..."

It was indeed a club application form. Upon seeing the club name that was written in, Satoshi raised his eyebrow.

"The Classics Club...?"

"You heard of it?"

"Of course, but, why the Classics Club? Have you suddenly found an interest in classic literature?"

Now how should I explain this? I scratched my head and took out another piece of paper from my inner left pocket. It was a letter with scribbled handwriting, which I handed over to Satoshi.

"Read it."

Satoshi promptly took the letter and started going through it, and as expected, began to laugh.

"Haha, Houtarou, now that sure is troublesome. A request from your sister, huh? No way you could refuse that."

Why was he looking so gleeful? On the other hand, I was very aware that I was showing a bitter expression. This airmail from India that arrived this morning was attempting to make adjustments to my lifestyle. Oreki Tomoe is constantly like that, sending letters to derail my life.

'Houtarou, safeguard the Classics Club, the youth of your big sis.'

When I had opened the envelope and read through that brief letter this morning, I became aware of its self-centered content. I had no obligation to safeguard my sister's memories, but...

"What was it that your sis is specialized in? Jujutsu?"

"Aikido and Taiho-jutsu^[2]. It can be pretty painful if one has the intent to hurt."

Yup, my sister, a university student proficient in both academics and martial arts, was not content with conquering Japan alone, and had decided to go out and challenge the world as well. It would not be wise to incur her fury.

Then again, while I could attempt to resist with what little pride I had, it was also true that I had little reason to oppose her. Indeed my sister has hit the bullseye by pointing out that I don't have anything better to do anyway. I decided I might as well be an invisible club member rather than an unaffiliated student, and so without hesitation, "I submitted that application this morning."

"You know what this means, Houtarou?"

Satoshi said while glancing at my sister's letter. I sighed and said, "Yeah, there doesn't seem to be any benefit from this."

"... No, that's not what I meant."

Lifting his gaze from the letter, Satoshi said with a strangely cheerful tone. He tapped the letter with the back of his palm and said, "There are currently no members in the Classics Club, right? This means that only *you* get to keep the club room for yourself. Isn't that great? A private base within school for your own use."

A private base?

"... That's an interesting way to look at this."

"Don't you like that?"

Such strange reasoning. Satoshi was basically saying I could have my own secret base in school. I could never come up with such an idea. A private space, huh? It's not like I really desire such a thing and would strive to work hard for it... But it's not so bad if it comes as a perk. I took back the letter from Satoshi and replied, "Guess it's not so bad. I might go have a look."

"Good. Opportunities are there for you to try out."

Opportunities there to try out, huh? Well, it's not like it doesn't suit my personality at all, so I smiled bitterly and picked up my shoulder bag.

I was still faithful to my own motto.

From the opened windows, the shouts of the Athletics Team could be heard.

"... Fight! Fight! Fight!..."

I wouldn't want to get myself involved in such wasteful energy consumption. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that saving energy is the superior option, so I'm not dismissing those active people as fools at all. I

headed towards the Classics Club room while hearing them continue with their chants.

I walked along the tiled corridor and up towards the third floor. Upon meeting the janitor, who was carrying a large ladder, I asked him where the Classics Club room was, and was directed to the Geology Lecture Room on the fourth floor of the Special Purposes Block.

This school, Kamiyama High School, was neither copious in its number of students nor large in its campus area.

The total number of students was somewhere around a thousand. While the school provides curricula for university entrance exams like most high schools, it wasn't particularly noted for its academics. In other words, it's a normal high school. On the other hand, the school had an extraordinarily large number of clubs (such as the Water Paint Club or the A Capella Club, as well as the Classics Club), hence it was quite well known for having a lively annual Cultural Festival.

Within the campus grounds there are three large buildings. The General Block which houses the regular classrooms, the Special Purposes Block with its special purposes classrooms, and the Gymnasium. That's quite normal really. There's also the Martial Arts Dojo and the Sports Equipment Storage Room. The fourth floor of the Special Purposes Block, where the Classics Club room is located, is relatively remote.

While cursing at such a waste of energy, I walked across the connecting corridor and up the stairs towards the fourth floor, where I quickly found the Geology Room. Without hesitation I proceeded to slide the door open, but found that it was locked. This was to be expected, as most special purposes rooms are normally locked. I took out the key which I borrowed beforehand in order to save energy and unlocked the door.

After turning the lock open, I slid the door open. Inside the empty Geology Room, the sunset could be seen from its westward facing window.

Did I say empty? Nope, turns out it was not what I expected.

Within the sunset drenched Geology Room, which is the Classics Club room, there was already someone inside.

A student was standing beside the window looking towards me. It was a girl.

While "graceful" and "neat" weren't exactly the first words that came to my mind upon seeing her, there were no other words that I could think of to describe her properly. Her long black hair flowed past her shoulders, and her sailor uniform suited her very well. She was tall for a girl, probably

taller than Satoshi. While it was clear she was a high school girl, her thin lips and forlorn figure reinforced this old-fashioned image of what a school girl would look like within my mind. In contrast, her pupils were big, and rather than graceful, they looked energetic.

It was a girl I didn't recognize.

Yet upon seeing me, she smiled and said, "Hello. You must be Oreki-san of the Classics Club, right?"

"... Who're you?"

I asked candidly. Though I was never good at interacting with people, I didn't intend to treat someone I just met for the first time coldly. While I didn't know who she was, for some reason, she seemed to know who I am.

"Don't you remember me? My name is Chitanda, Chitanda Eru."

Chitanda Eru. Even though she's given her name, I still haven't got a clue. By the way, Chitanda is quite a rare surname, and so is her first name, Eru. It was not possible for me to forget such a name.

I looked once again at the girl called Chitanda. After making sure that I don't know her, I replied, "I'm sorry, I don't think I remember who you are."

While maintaining her smile, she tilted her head, apparently confused.

"You're Oreki-san, right? Oreki Houtarou of Class 1-B?"

I nodded.

"I'm from Class 1-A."

So do you remember now? Was what she seemed to be hinting at... Was my memory really that bad?

Hang on. I'm from Class B and she's from Class A, was there any chance of us having met before?

Even within the same grade, it was not possible for students from different classes to interact with each other at all. The only chance they get to do so was via club activities or friends. I had no such links with both. Then it must have involved the entire student body, but the only event I could think of was the school's opening ceremony at the start of the semester. Besides, I don't think I was ever introduced to anyone from outside my class then.

No, wait. I remember. That's it, there were chances for us to interact with other classes during lessons. If it involves the use of special equipment, then it's more feasible to teach more than one class at the same time. That must mean during PE or arts-related subjects. During middle school, there would also be vocational classes, but as this high school is a mainly academic

school, that's out of the equation. And PE is gender separated, so that leaves...

"Could it be that we had music lessons together?"

"Yes, that's it!"

Chitanda nodded her head greatly.

Despite figuring that out myself, I was still surprised. For the sake of my remaining pride, I must confess that I have only attended any of those optional arts lessons once ever since enrolling here. So it was of course impossible for me to remember any faces or names!

But on the other hand, this girl called Chitanda managed to remember me after seeing me just once, so here was living proof that it was not exactly impossible... Let me tell you this, she must have possessed a frightening level of observation and memory.

Still, it could also be that it's all coincidental. Different people could interpret different meanings from reading the same newspaper article, after all. I regained my senses and asked, "So, Chitanda-san. What brings you here to the Geology Room?"

She quickly replied, "I've joined the Classics Club, so I thought I should come to greet you."

Joined the Classics Club, in other words, a member.

At that moment I had wanted her to guess how I was feeling. If she's joining the club, it would mean the end of my private space as well as having to fulfill my obligation to my sister. I had no reason to join the Classics Club. I sighed within my heart... *It was a futile effort.* While thinking that, I asked, "Why are you in the Classics Club as well?"

I didn't want to join this club! I tried to convey this implied message within my question, but it seemed like she totally didn't get it.

"Well, I have personal reasons for joining."

She even evaded my question. Unexpectedly, this Chitanda Eru is quite suspicious.

"What about you, Oreki-san?"

"Me?"

Now that's tricky. How should I answer her? I don't think she'd understand that I came here due to an order from my sister. But as I began to think about it, I realized she didn't really need to know my reason.

Suddenly the door slid open and a loud voice boomed inwards, "Hey! What are you guys doing here?"

It was a teacher. Probably patrolling the campus after school time. With a firm body and tanned skin, he seems to be a PE teacher. Though he wasn't carrying a bamboo sword, it wouldn't look too far fetched to imagine him with one. While he's way past his prime, he still has that air of authority around him.

Chitanda shirked back for a bit upon getting yelled at so suddenly, but soon reverted to her calming smile. She then went to greet the teacher.

"Good afternoon, Morishita-sensei."

She made a perfect salutation by the way she bowed her head with the right speed and angle. Seeing how she maintained her manners regardless of where she was, I couldn't help but feel envious of her. The teacher called Morishita was briefly stunned into silence by her courtesy, but soon went back to talking loudly again.

"I saw the door unlocked so I came over to see what was going on. What are you doing entering the classroom without permission? What's your name and class?"

... Hmph, without permission, huh?

"I'm Oreki Houtarou of Class 1-B. By the way, Sensei, this is the Classics Club room, and I'm afraid you've interrupted our club activities,"

"The Classics Club...?"

Without hiding his suspicions, he continued, "I thought that had been abolished."

"Well, that was before today. It's been reactivated this morning. You can confirm with our supervising teacher, umm..."

"Ooide-sensei,"

"Yes, you can confirm with Ooide-sensei."

A suitable explanation at a suitable moment. Morishita quickly lowered his volume.

"Oh. I see. Well, continue with what you're doing."

"But you've only just seen us."

"And remember to return the key when you're done."

"Yes, sir."

Morishita once again turned to gaze at us before shutting the door roughly. Chitanda once again cowered her body at the loud sound, but then gently whispered, "He's..."

"Hmm?"

"He's quite loud for a teacher."

I smiled.

Anyway.

Guess I have no more business here.

"Alright. Now that we're done with the introductions, shall we go home?"

"Huh? We're not having any activities today?"

"Well, I'm going home."

I picked up my shoulder bag, which doesn't have much stuff in it, and turned my back towards Chitanda.

"I'll count on you to lock the door. You don't want to get yelled at like that again, do you?"

"Eh?"

I then proceeded to leave the Geology Room.

Or rather, I was about to leave, when I was stopped by Chitanda's discerning voice.

"Please wait!"

I turned around to look at Chitanda, who looked as though she had been told something quite unthinkable, and who said blankly, "I, I can't lock the door."

"Why's that?"

"Because I don't have the key."

Oh, yeah. The key's with me. There weren't that many spare keys available to be borrowed, it seems. So I took the key from my pocket and held it towards her.

"Here, you take care of... Sorry, I mean, please take care of this, Chitanda-san."

But Chitanda didn't respond. She simply stared at the key hanging from my finger, and before long she tilted her head and asked, "Oreki-san, why are you carrying that?"

Is she missing a few screws in her head?

"Well, I couldn't have come in without a key... Wait a minute, how the hell... sorry, how did you come in to this room, Chitanda-san?"

"The door wasn't locked when I came in. I thought someone else had entered before me, so I didn't need a key to enter."

I see. Since unless she received a letter from a former member like I have, she wouldn't have known that there were no other members in the Classics Club.

"Is that so? When I came the door was locked."

Turns out it was a mistake for me to utter that so nonchalantly, as the expression in Chitanda's eyes changed instantly and her gaze became sharp. Was it me or have her pupils gotten larger? Indifferent to my startled expression, she slowly asked me, "When you said the door was locked, do you mean that door which you came through?"

While feeling confused at such a change in expression for such a graceful girl, I nodded. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Chitanda took one step towards me.

"So this means that I was locked inside, right?"

The clear batting sounds made by the Baseball Team could be heard from the outside. While I have no more business with this room, Chitanda seemed to want to talk for a bit longer. I sighed and relented, and placed my shoulder bag down on a table nearby.

Locked inside, was what Chitanda had said. Is that so? I thought for a bit. The key was with me, while Chitanda was inside the room. I have no memory of ever locking the door. Then the answer was simple.

"Wasn't it you who locked the door from the inside?"

Yet Chitanda shook her head and denied that unequivocally.

"I never did that."

"Well, the key's with me. Who else could have locked the door besides you?"

"..."

"Well, there are times when people forget whether they've locked the door or not,"

Yet Chitanda doesn't seem to be paying attention to my explanation, and suddenly pointed right behind me.

"By the way, is that your friend over there?"

I turned around, and found the silhouette of a black uniform collar from behind the gap of the slightly ajar door. His gaze quickly met with mine. I remember seeing those brown eyes that look as though they're smiling, so I raised my voice and called out, "Satoshi! That's some sick hobby you've got, eavesdropping on other people's conversations!"

The door was opened, and as expected, the person that entered was Fukube Satoshi. Totally feeling unashamed, he said brazenly, "Well, sorry. I wasn't intending to eavesdrop."

"You may not be intending to, but you ended up doing so anyway."

"That may be so. But I just couldn't barge in when I saw the usually inactive Houtarou spending quality time alone with a girl in a special classroom during sunset. I don't want to end up getting kicked out."

What's he talking about?

"I thought you went home already."

"Yeah, I was about to, but then I saw you with this girl inside this room from downstairs. Guess I'm still inexperienced as a peeping tom."

I ignored Satoshi's comments about seeing us from the outside, as that's his usual way of joking. Yet for people who're not used to such light-hearted jokes, they might end up taking him seriously.

Seems like Chitanda too has been fooled.

"Eh, eh, I..."

Her calm expression from a while ago had disappeared, being replaced by a flustered look. She seems to be the type that wears her expressions on her face, as she appears to be saying "Look, I'm feeling flustered right now" with a nervous look. While it was fun to see her like that, I wasn't going to let it go on any longer.

Fortunately, in order to expose Satoshi's joke, all you needed to do was ask him, "Are you serious?"

"Of course not."

Phew. Chitanda breathed a sigh of relief. Such was Satoshi's motto: "Jokes are to be made on the spot, so too are misunderstandings to be dispelled right away."

"... Oreki-san, who might this be?"

After recovering from Satoshi's joke, Chitanda asked a bit wearily. Guess I should introduce Satoshi to her, or we won't get anywhere. I said briefly, "Oh him? That's Fukube Satoshi, a pseudo-human."

"Pseudo?"

A most suitable introduction, which Satoshi seems to have taken in good humour as well.

"Haha, great introduction, Houtarou. Pleased to meet you. And you are?"

"Chitanda, Chitanda Eru."

Upon hearing the name of Chitanda, Satoshi gave an unexpected reaction. For once, he actually went speechless. For someone so talkative like Satoshi, it was rare to see him like that.

"Chi, Chitanda-san? *That* Chitanda?"

"Hmm? I don't know which Chitanda you may be referring to, but I believe I'm the only one with that name in this school."

"Then it must be that. I'm surprised."

Satoshi's surprise was genuine. And if he was surprised, then I should be too. I learned some time ago that this fellow has a way of finding out all sorts of amazing information. Yet what was it that made him so surprised? I couldn't even guess.

"Hey, Satoshi, what is it this time?"

"What is it, you say? I know you're not that well-informed, but are you telling me that you've never even heard of the Chitanda Clan?"

This time, Satoshi shook his head and sighed in an exaggerated way. Of course, this was one of Satoshi's ways of joking. Since I know he's extremely well-versed in all sorts of useless knowledge, I was not at all ashamed about being ignorant of one of them.

"What about Chitanda-san's family?"

Nodding satisfactorily, Satoshi began to explain.

"While there are quite a few old prestigious clans in Kamiyama Town, the most prominent are the four 'Exponential Clans'. The Juumonji (十文字) Clan that runs the Arekusu Shrine, the Sarusuberi (百日紅) Clan that operates the bookstores, the Chitanda (千反田) Clan with their large farmlands, and the Manninbashi (万人橋) Clan of the mountain. The first kanji character of their surnames is represented by an exponent of the number ten (十百千万), hence they're called the 'Exponential Clans'. The

only other clans to be on equal footing with those four are the Irisu Clan that runs the local hospital, and the Toogaito Clan with their dominance in the field of education."

Dumbfounded, I blinked suspiciously and asked, "Four Clans? Satoshi, are you serious?"

"How rude. Have I ever lied about stuff like this?"

If Satoshi says it's true, then it's most likely true. Yet, prestigious clans in this day and age? While Satoshi was still scowling, Chitanda came to his aid.

"Umm, I've heard of that story before. Though I'm not quite sure about my family being a famous clan."

"So it's all true?"

"But, this is the first time I've heard about the four 'Exponential Clans'."

As I stared at Satoshi, he merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't say I was lying."

"But that was all made up anyway, wasn't it?"

"Well, I always wanted to be the one to get a legend started,"

As though wanting this topic to end, Satoshi clapped his hands together and said, "Anyway, Houtarou, what seems to be the trouble here?"

You sure are inquisitive. So in order to make a long story short, I briefly explained the details to him.

It was getting a bit dark, so Chitanda went to turn on the lights.

After hearing the story, Satoshi crossed his arms and started to groan.

"Hmm, it is a strange case."

"How so? It's just that Chitanda happened to forget that she locked the door, isn't it?"

"No, it *is* strange."

Satoshi uncrossed his arms and clapped his hands.

"Lately, schools have been very demanding on how their campuses are run. Kami High's management of its classrooms is particularly bothersome. In case you haven't noticed, none of the classrooms here can be locked from the inside. The reason is to prevent students from doing anything suspicious inside."

As Satoshi explained triumphantly, a suspicion was raised in my head. I know Satoshi can be particularly diligent in finding out such trivial knowledge, but isn't he learning a bit too much? Considering he's only been in this school for less than a month.

"How'd you know about this stuff?"

"Well, I was trying to hide myself in a classroom in order to experiment with something last week, but then I found out I couldn't lock the door from the inside."

"You know? I think the school designed its doors to prevent specifically the likes of *you* from 'doing anything suspicious'."

"Well, I guess so."

"You bet."

We both laughed. As a result of our dry laughter, Chitanda took a step backwards. Noticing this, I cleared my throat and said, "Well, something must be wrong with the lock then. It's getting dark, so I'm going home."

I stood up from the table I was sitting on.

I felt someone grab my shoulder. I turned and saw Chitanda, who had somehow approached me from behind without me realizing.

"Please wait!"

"What is it now?"

"I'm curious about it."

Upon seeing Chitanda's close-up face, I winced.

"So?"

"Why was I being locked inside? ... If I wasn't locked inside, then how did I manage to come inside in the first place?"

Chitanda's gaze had a sort of power that seemed like it wouldn't accept a foolish answer as a response. Feeling overwhelmed by this, I replied meekly, "So, what about it?"

"If it was a mistake by someone, then who is it? And how did they end up locking me in by mistake?"

"No, I think there's something wrong with the lock..."

"I'm *really* curious about it."

She said as she advanced forward, forcing me to move back.

At first I thought Chitanda to be a sort of graceful lady, but that was merely my first impression based on her appearance. I now realized that I was looking at her true self. Especially her large energetic looking eyes, which are in contrast to her overall appearance. Those eyes reflected her true nature. "I'm curious about it", that sentence alone had made this "Exponential Clan" lady the poster child for curiosity itself.

"Why has this happened? Oreki-san, and Fukube-san as well, will you help think about this?"

"Why do I have to..."

"Well, it looks interesting."

Interrupting me, Satoshi accepted her challenge right away. As expected from Satoshi, but, "Well, I'm going home. Not interested."

It goes without explanation, for me, it's a waste of energy. And if I don't have to do it, I'm out of it.

Yet, Satoshi, who ought to know my *modus operandi* very well, said, "Oh, come on, Houtarou, help us out. I'd do it if I could, but I can't come to any conclusions just based on my own database alone."

"This is stupid, I'm..."

As I was about to continue, Satoshi glanced sideways. Following his glance, I saw Chitanda.

"... Ugh."

With her mouth tightly shut, and her fists clutching her skirt, she glared upwards at me. I subconsciously took another step backwards away from her. If it's just comparing the intensity of personalities, she wouldn't lose to my sister. It was a warning from Satoshi: *I think you're better off going along with her whims.*

Glancing alternately between Chitanda and Satoshi, I nodded softly towards Satoshi and honestly took his advice. Otherwise, we might incur misfortune upon ourselves.

"... Yeah, I guess it *is* interesting. I'll think about it."

I had no choice but to say that in a deadpan tone. Yet that response was enough to get Chitanda to relax her glance.

"Oreki-san, have you thought of a solution already?"

"Hold it right there. Houtarou is the type that likes to think before he moves. Yet once he's put his thoughts together, he's capable of getting things done."

Stop being so talkative. Though moving before thinking is never good.
And so I began to think.

When Chitanda entered this room, the lock was opened. Yet when I arrived, it was clearly locked.

If Satoshi is to be believed, then there's no way Chitanda could have locked the door from the inside. However, rather than such an arbitrary reason, it could be that it was the result of an unconscious action. For example, the door was in a semi-locked state when Chitanda entered the room, and the spring within the lock must have somehow been triggered after she was inside and locked her in as a result.

After explaining this theory, Chitanda tilted her head while reserving her judgment, though Satoshi instantly raised his voice.

"That would be impossible. There is no way the locks in Kami High could have gone into a semi-locked condition based on its design. The key would not have come out in such a state."

No room for middle ground, huh?

If that's the case, then that leaves the lock being locked knowingly by someone. So I asked, "Do you remember what time you entered this room?"

Chitanda thought for a while and said, "Right before you. About three minutes, I think."

Three minutes, that's too short. There wouldn't be time, as the Geology Room is the most remote place in Kami High.

... Now this is getting tricky. As I was starting to think all over again, Chitanda suddenly shouted, "Ah!"

"What is it, Chitanda-san?"

"I know. Think about it, who else has the key?"

"Huh? Who?"

Chitanda had a joyful look in her smile... For some reason, I had a bad feeling about this. As expected, our lady here turned towards me and said, "Oreki-san, of course. He has the key."

Just as predicted. Rather than concluding that it was a good deduction, she realized something and said, "Ah, but is this even possible? Isn't Oreki-san a trustworthy person?"

... Are you supposed to say such things in front of the person concerned? While I was speechless, Satoshi laughed and said, "Well, I don't know about Houtarou being trustworthy or not, but I don't think he's the sort of person that would have fun by locking you inside. He's got nothing to gain from it, after all."

Spot on there. You know me well - I wouldn't do anything that doesn't benefit me.

This means it wasn't me that locked the door.

Then... who was it?

I don't get this. So I proceeded to scratch my head.

I don't even have a clue. For some reason, I felt guilty as I asked, "This is no good. You got any clues?"

"Clue? What do you mean by that?"

What a straight counter question.

"A clue is a clue."

Satoshi helped elaborate on my over-simplified explanation.

"Something that's different from the norm. Did you notice anything that feels different or strange, Chitanda-san?"

"Hmm, now that you mention..."

Is there something different? While I wasn't exactly expecting much, Chitanda was looking around the Geology Room before turning her gaze downward and said gently, "A while ago, I heard some sounds coming from beneath my feet."

Sounds?

So someone did lock the door? I had no idea.

No, what if, that's the case?

... I see. I've somehow come to an understanding. Satoshi noticed my expression and said, "Houtarou, you seemed to have realized something."

I silently picked up my shoulder bag.

"W, where are you going, Oreki-san?"

"We're going to witness the reenactment of the scene of crime. If we're lucky, we might get to see it."

I sensed Chitanda frantically following me, and Satoshi is right behind her, no doubt.

It was already quite late as closing time was approaching. The Baseball Team could clearly be seen tidying up their equipment. Chitanda and Satoshi, whom I should have already left behind long ago, ended up accompanying me. Or rather, they were following me.

Chitanda walked beside me and asked, "Tell us already. How come you've figured out already?"

Satoshi too asked from behind, "She's right, you know. We're not supposed to have secrets between us."

Stop saying something so gross. Without turning my head, I said, "It's not exactly a secret. It's just that it's so simple that it doesn't require much explanation."

"It may be simple for you, Oreki-san. But I still can't understand."

Chitanda pouted... While it's bothersome to explain, evading her questions is also a waste of energy. I straightened my shoulder bag and wondered where I should start.

"Alright, how about if I say that you were locked inside by someone using a master key?"

As I said something that was a matter of fact to me, Chitanda's voice was raised in surprise. Looks like we'll have to start the explanations here.

"Ehh? How is that so?"

"The Geology Room is located far off in the campus. If someone were to lock you inside using the regular key, he would need to return it to the staff room before I could have borrowed it. Three minutes would be too short for anyone to attempt to do that."

"I see. So it must be another key, and since there's only one regular key, that would leave the master key, right?"

Exactly. And naturally, it's to be expected that the master key couldn't normally be used by students.

Furthermore, there is another piece of decisive information.

"Chitanda-san, you said you heard something coming from the floor below you, right?"

"Yes."

"If the sound comes from the floor of the fourth floor, what would you normally have thought of first?"

Satoshi, who looked quite relaxed, answered, "The sound comes from the ceiling of the third floor?"

"Right. And that's our master key user."

The only person who would work on fixing stuff on the classroom ceilings after lesson time would be...

"I'm amazed you managed to figure out that it's the janitor."

Chitanda said while nodding eagerly.

The person that we saw on the third floor was the janitor, who was carrying a large ladder. As he emerged from a classroom, he placed the ladder on the floor and took out a key from his pocket. And right before our eyes, he began to lock the doors of the third floor classrooms one by one. In other words, he first unlocked all the classroom doors, then proceeded to do whatever he was working on inside the classrooms. And when he was done, he would then come back to lock them all at once. If someone happens to enter the classrooms when the doors were unlocked, then that unlucky person would have ended up getting locked inside... Much like Chitanda here.

As to what the janitor was working on, I had no idea. By going through so many classrooms and carrying a large ladder with him, it could be that he's changing the light bulbs for the classrooms, or perhaps checking on the glow starters or fire alarms or something like that. At any rate, Chitanda's question has been largely solved.

And thus a case is closed.

"You see? Told you he'd get things done if he puts his thoughts together."

"You're right. I'm amazed."

I don't see myself as that amazing... After all, it was Satoshi that told me about the key management system, while it was Chitanda that noticed the sound coming from below. I was planning on playing dumb all along... Oh well, they can think whatever they like of me. At any rate, I was made to go through all that trouble, but upon looking at Chitanda and seeing such honest admiration reflected in her meaningful eyes, I ended up swallowing any complaints that I may have had.

"Well, anyway. Even though you were in an indoor environment, I still don't understand how you didn't hear the door being locked."

Yet Chitanda didn't take that as a criticism or sarcasm, and merely smiled.

"Well, I could explain that. I was... yes, I was looking at that building from the window."

She said and pointed towards a building by the road. It was the Martial Arts Dojo. It was a shabby looking wooden building, worn down after being exposed to the elements for so long. I decided to take a leaf out of Chitanda's book and voiced my honest opinion, "Seems like you're really mesmerized by that."

"No, it's just that I find this building to be quite mysterious."

"Hmm."

I don't see how this building was mysterious, but Satoshi seemed to have understood something when he muttered, "Well, it does look particularly old."

"Yes, it is."

Is that so? It could be, though for her to have been distracted by such an old building, I had no idea whether she was being elegant or just carefree.

Before long, we came upon a red traffic light. Like us, there were other students heading home from school.

"By the way, we haven't properly greeted each other yet," Chitanda gently said.

"Greeted?"

"Yes, the Classics Club is going to commence its activities from now on, after all. Let us have fun together."

The Classics Club! I've totally forgotten about that! I was supposed to just go take a look at the club room, but it was all for naught as Chitanda had joined the club... But this is all in hindsight now. My application has already been submitted and subsequently filed on record. In this school, it was impossible to quit a club after joining it for one month.

As I lowered my head, Chitanda turned to smile at Satoshi.

"Are you joining the Classics Club as well, Fukube-san?"

Satoshi crossed his arms and looked as though he was thinking, but very soon replied, "Well, it sounds interesting. Alright, I'm in."

"It'll be a pleasure to get to know you, Fukube-san."

"No, the pleasure's all mine... Pleased to meet you as well, Houtarou."

I glanced mockingly at Satoshi, who decided to play dumb.

As the traffic light turned green, I started to walk. Sticking my hand in my pocket, I felt the letter inside. It was the letter from my sister. Indeed, ever since this letter from Oreki Tomoe had arrived, I had this feeling that something had been set in motion.

You happy now, sis? There are now three people within your youth that is the Classics Club. The traditional Classics Club has now been resurrected. This is also probably goodbye to my peaceful energy saving days. As for why...

"Ah yes, we still haven't decided on a president yet. What should we do?"

"You're right. Though Houtarou definitely doesn't seem to be the sort of person to be a club president."

These folks probably wouldn't put up with my energy saving ways. If it were just Satoshi alone, I could still handle him somehow, but the main problem is...

Our eyes met. Chitanda Eru smiled with her big eyes.

The main problem is with this lady here. I just have a vague feeling about this.

3 - The Activities of the Prestigious Classics Club

Now that I think about it, what *does* the Classics Club do anyway? The only students that do know what it does are no longer with the school, and I couldn't be bothered to ask the teachers about it. I could ask my sister about it, but unfortunately she's in Beirut. Still, while it's rare to have a club that does not know what it does, there are plenty of clubs whose existence can only be classified as a mystery, so it's not something worth fretting about.

It has been a month since the resurrection of the Classics Club. The club room - the Geology Room - was no longer a private space, but it was still a relaxing spot. It was a place where I could kill some time after school whenever I'm feeling bored. Satoshi might be inside. Or Chitanda might be inside. Or both of them might be inside. Or not. It doesn't really matter either way. We could choose to converse, or we could also choose to keep quiet. Satoshi was the sort that could calmly endure silence to begin with, while our lady Chitanda was the sort of graceful lady befitting of her image, as long as she doesn't let her curiosity explode. Therefore, while unintentional, this club appears more like a leisure club than a school club.

Thus I do not get weary even amidst their company, since I was never apprehensive of other people to begin with, though Satoshi does sometimes mistake that I am.

Today was a drizzly day, and I was inside with Chitanda. I was leaning back on a chair by the window, reading a cheap paperback while Chitanda sat at the front of the room reading a thick book for some reason. One would say this was a sluggish afternoon after school.

Looking at the clock, I noticed only 30 minutes had passed. The time that was spent unconsciously was still short. Although you could say I was feeling quite relaxed, that isn't exactly correct. Rather, it was because I was feeling nervous and stressful that I had to enter into a state of relaxation. I'm really just consciously trying to extend my energy saving mode for as long as possible, that's all.

The silence was only broken by the sound of pages turning and the raindrops outside.

" ... "

I'm getting sleepy now. I think I'll go home as soon as the rain stops.

Thud The sound of a book closing was heard, as Chitanda, who sat in front with her back facing towards me, sighed and said,

"How barren."

While she wasn't looking at me, it was clear she was speaking to me rather than to herself. Though I had no idea how to respond to her sudden comment. Anyway, I'll try asking.

"What? The crops in your family farmland?"

"Those have two crops."

Chitanda answered as though reading it out and turned around,

"And they're semi-annual. So it's hardly barren."^[1]

"As expected of a lady of a farmland owner."

"No, there's no need to praise me..."

The sound of rain, followed by silence.

"No, that's not what I was saying."

"You were saying something about 'barren'."

"Yes, that. It's barren."

"What is?"

Chitanda looked firmly at me, and then raised her right arm as though showing the whole room,

"All this time spent after lessons. We don't seem to have any purpose or do anything productive at all."

Of course, this was merely a way to kill time, not to produce anything. I closed my paperback and looked up towards her,

"Well, I'm all ears. Is there something you want the Classics Club to do?"

"Me?"

It was kind of a mean question, as not many people are aware what they themselves would want to do when asked directly. By the way, I'm at least aware that I desire nothing.

However, Chitanda replied without hesitation,

"Yes, there is."

"Hmm."

That's surprising. To answer yes right away. As I was about to ask what was it she was interested in doing, she explained, "Though that's for personal reasons."

In that case, there was no need to ask further.

Chitanda then continued,

"But we're talking about the Classics Club. So we should be doing something club related. We can't just sit around and do nothing."

"Very well, but we aren't even sure what the club's purpose is."

"No, there is a purpose."

Whether she's speaking with the authority of a club president or the aura of a prestigious clan member, Chitanda declared, "We will publish an essay anthology this October in the Cultural Festival."

The Cultural Festival?

I had visited the Kamiyama High Cultural Festival before, so I was familiar with it. To put it briefly, it was the essence of youth culture around this area. And according to Satoshi, the Kami High Cultural Festival's Nodate tea ceremony is highly recommended for anyone interested in learning the art, while its break dancing contest is a hotbed for future professionals. Quite a number of arts-related clubs of various qualities would participate. During her three years in high school, I remember seeing my sister carrying a boxload of essay anthologies to school.

So to speak, that was the crystallization of the rose-coloured high school life. As to how I feel about all this, I guess it's better for me not to say anything about it. Let's just say that I hardly felt anything at all, not even once.

However, an essay anthology, huh? I gave some thought to Chitanda's proposal, and asked a question that naturally came to mind, "Chitanda, making an anthology is just an end result, and not the whole purpose of the club itself, isn't it?"

Chitanda shook her head and replied,

"No, if the purpose of the club is the making of the anthology, then by creating the result we could achieve its purpose."

"What?"

"Like I said, if the result *is* the purpose itself, then all we have to do is aim for the result, right?"

Hmm, I raised my eyebrows. I think I get what she's trying to say, but isn't that tautology?

Anyway, an anthology just sounds bothersome. While I could not say for sure that anthologies, or anything else that requires me to write something on my own, are bothersome, it would be better if I don't have to do it. Whether it's the purpose or the activity itself, either requires me to come up with something. Unnecessary activities cost effort, which is a waste of energy.

"Let's not do an anthology. It's too labour-intensive. Besides... right, three authors is a bit too much."

Yet Chitanda was steadfast with her proposal,

"No, it has to be an anthology."

"If you really want to publish something, we can set up an exhibition booth or something like that."

"Kami High's Cultural Festival traditionally forbids exhibition booths. So, no, it has to be an anthology."

"... Why?"

"Our club budget specifically refers to 'Anthology Publication', it would be troublesome if we don't publish one."

Chitanda took out a piece of neatly folded paper from her chest pocket and showed it to me. Indeed, for this year's Classics Club annual budget, the tiny amount of money that was allocated was specifically set for the purpose of "Anthology Publication".

"Even so, Ooide-sensei has requested that we publish it, as it's become a tradition for over 30 years for the Classics Club to publish an anthology each year, and he was not going to watch it come to an end."

"..."

As a rule of thumb, reasonable people tend to be smart. Yet it doesn't mean unreasonable people are dumb. Chitanda was definitely not dumb, yet she was clearly being unreasonable. To begin with, she appealed to the sentimental side rather than the financial side, and decided the club's activity based on tradition. Still, I realized it was inefficient to try to argue against something done in the name of tradition, so I smiled bitterly and relented,

"Okay, okay. We'll publish an anthology."

So ends unceremoniously my purposeless carefree days. At least I'm still in good health, I guess.

The rain is still falling outside. Since it's still not time to go home yet, I decided to ask, "So, how are you going to publish this anthology?"

"How? What do you mean?"

"What kind of essays were written every year?"

While it's not likely, I was already resigned to writing academic-like essays along the titles of "Review of 'The Eight Dog Chronicles^[2]'", "'Tales of Moonlight and Rain^[3]' - With regards to the Emperor's role in 'Shiramine'", or "'The Great Mirror^[4]' - Concerning observations of social changes in the novel, as well as counter-argument to last year's essay". Just to be safe, I should include an appendix as well. Though I was prepared to accept that I would probably not produce anything up to the standards of past essays. At any rate, as to just what kind of format this so-called tradition adopts for its essays, I have no idea.

However, the answer I received was in the negative.

"Hmm, I'm not sure. I wonder what should we write?"

It was to be expected. As she was president, it was easy to forget that she too was only in the club for about a month or so.

"I'm sure we could find out if we can find the back issues."

"They should be around. You know where they are?"

"In the clubroom?"

I see.

I suddenly feel pathetic for going along with her pace. I promptly pointed my finger towards the floor for her to see.

"... Oh! This *is* the club room."

Exactly.

"Though it hardly feels like a club room..."

She's right though.

This Geology Room had nothing else inside it besides standard teaching equipment. All we could see were a blackboard, tables and chairs, as well as cleaning equipment. A typical looking classroom, all in all. There didn't seem to be anywhere books could be stored.

"The back issues don't seem to be stored here."

"So it seems."

"Well then... shall we head to the library?"

That sounded appropriate, so I nodded. Chitanda picked up her handbag and stood up.

"Let's go."

Without waiting for my reply, she opened the door and walked out. She's quite proactive for an elegant lady. Oh well, the library is just along the path to the school entrance, which isn't too far from here.

No, wait. Today's Friday, which means today's librarian on duty is...

"Well, if it isn't Oreki? It's been a while, though I've hardly missed you."

Upon entering the library, I was instantly greeted with sarcasm. As expected, the person sitting behind the counter was none other than Ibara Mayaka.

Ibara and I go back a long way, as we've been in the same class for nine years since primary school. Her baby-face features have been in place since childhood, and have only grown-up a bit after becoming a high-school student. You may find her child-like features and short stature cute, but do not be fooled by her appearance, for she carries a hidden weapon with her at all times. If you let your guard down, you would be greeted by her colourful blend of sarcastic wit. I was even told to stay away from her based on stories of guys who were fooled by her pretty looks, only to be sunk instantly. Not to mention as a result of her never admitting her mistakes, most people would mistake her for being a callous person.

Though I personally don't really believe such assessments of her.

I made the most unpleasant expression I could make and replied,

"Hey, I came just to see you."

"This is a sacred ground for cultivation, it's not made for the likes of you to visit."

Ibara sat cross-legged on her chair behind the counter. Since all a librarian ever does is to handle the lending and borrowing of books from the library, there doesn't seem to be much else for her to do. While one of her main responsibilities was to take the box containing the returned books back to their respective shelves, the Return Box was still filled with a whole pile of books. Ibara was not the type to slack off, so she's probably attempting to

do them all in one go. In her hand was a large book, which she's no doubt reading to kill time.

The library was quite crowded at this time. There were about ten four-person tables, and each of them was occupied by one or two students reading. There were probably people who were indeed reading for leisure, though I'd also understand if there were people killing time while waiting for the rain to stop. I then noticed one of the boys looking up at us. I recognized him at once, since it's Fukube Satoshi of all people.

Satoshi met my gaze and stood up with his usual smile,

"Hey, Houtarou, didn't expect to see you here."

Ibara looked at us with a sullen face and said,

"Still good buddies as ever, aren't you? As expected from the Best Couple of Kaburaya Junior High."

I knew it was pointless to argue back at her, but still I said, "Oh, shut up."

Ibara merely replied flatly, "My, you're quite a crybaby for a gloomy person."

... A crybaby, huh?

She then turned towards Satoshi with a composed expression,

"Fuku-chan, you know how my feelings are, so you should know I was joking, right?"

"Ahh, don't worry about that, Mayaka. No offence taken."

"What? You're just gonna let her use joking as an excuse to let her off the hook again?"

Satoshi glared at me, and then turned his gaze away. I smiled bitterly, as I knew Ibara has been pursuing him for some time. I have no idea when she started doing so, though Satoshi has been dodging her advances ever since.

Satoshi pretended to cough in an attempt to change the subject.

"Anyway, what business does the Classics Club have in the library?"

Ah, yes, I didn't come to the library just to see Ibara. I urged Chitanda to say something. As though suffering from stage fright, our lady said nervously to Ibara, "Uh, umm, hi there. May I inquire something of you?"

"Sure, how may I help you?"

"I'd like to ask if there are any essay anthologies here in the library."

"Yup, they're at those shelves right over there."

"Do they have those for the Classics Club?"

Ibara tilted her head and wondered,

"The Classics Club? ...Hmm, I'm sorry, don't think I'm sure of that. Should I look for them for you?"

Just as Chitanda was about to express her gratitude, Satoshi stopped her,

"You won't find any. I've occasionally looked up on those shelves, so I should know. Mayaka, where else could they be found if they're not on the shelves?"

"Hmm, if they're not in the open shelves, then they must be in the archives."

"The archives, huh?"

Satoshi thought for a while before asking,

"Chitanda-san, why're you looking for essay anthologies anyway?"

"We're going to publish one for the Cultural Festival, so we were wondering if we can have a look at the back issues for reference."

"Oh, so they're for the Kanya Festival, huh? Didn't know you were knowledgeable on such stuff, Houtarou."

Knowledgeable? Rather, I was obliged to work on it. Besides, Chitanda probably doesn't even need me to be knowledgeable.

Wait, what festival again?

"Satoshi, what did you just call the Cultural Festival?"

"The Kanya Festival. Haven't you heard of it before? It's the nickname for the Kami High Cultural Festival."

A nickname, huh? Something like the Sophia Festival for Sophia University, or the Mita Festival for Keio University? Then again, like the story about the four "Exponential Clans", I find it hard to believe.

"Sounds suspicious. Is that true?"

"Of course it's true, though it's an unofficial nickname. I heard all my seniors in the Handicraft Club call it the Kanya Festival. Is it the same in the Manga Studies Club, Mayaka?"

So Ibara's in the Manga Studies Club, huh? While it does suit her image, it still feels unbecoming for her.

"Yup, everyone there calls it the Kanya Festival. Even the festival committee calls it that."

"Kanya? How do you spell that in kanji?"

Satoshi placed his hand on his chin and said,

"Dunno. Everybody just calls it that."

It seems like it's true that 'Kanya Festival' is a nickname. However, I just couldn't think of any word that matches with the spelling of 'Kanya'. Oh well, seeking out the etymology of such a silly name is probably a profession in itself. As I was thinking of that, Satoshi added,

"Perhaps it's abbreviated from 'Kamiyama', turning it into 'Kanyama', and in turn evolving into 'Kanya'."

As expected for an expert of trivial knowledge.

As we were going off topic, Ibara firmly pulled us back,

"Anyhow, anthologies, is it? We'll probably find them if we look up the archives, though the Head Librarian's in a meeting right now, so we can't go in without her permission. She'll probably be back in half an hour, you wanna wait?"

Half an hour, huh? Not even Chitanda was in a hurry to want to see them at once, so she looked at me and whispered, "What do we do now?" I was fine with whatever decision, but I noticed it's still raining heavily outside. The weather report did say the rain will stop sometime in the afternoon and we'd have a starry night tonight, but as the rain showed no signs of stopping right now, we had no choice but to wait.

"Guess we'll wait."

"Even though you could go back?"

I decided to return to my paperback novel and resume at the page where I was reading. Satoshi tugged at Ibara's sleeve and said, "Mayaka, why don't you tell Houtarou about the story you were telling me earlier?"

Ibara lifted her eyebrows and thought for a while before nodding.

"Okay. Oreki, do you ever feel like exercising your brain once in a while?"

Nope.

But neither has Ibara.

"What story are you talking about?"

Satoshi answered Chitanda's question with his usual smile on his face,

"The one about the popular book which no one ever reads."

"As you know, my shift is every Friday after school, and I've discovered lately that the same book has been returned during this time every week. This is the fifth week in a row now. Don't you find it strange?"

Ibara began to speak while I was busy looking for a desk where I could sit down and read my book. Unfortunately, there just weren't any available seats in such a crowded place. So I had no choice but to sit on top of the table that Satoshi had occupied.

As the table was close to the counter, we could hear Chitanda and Ibara's voices from here.

"Is it a popular book?"

"Does this look like one?"

Ibara showed us the thick book she was holding.

"Oh, such a beautiful book..."

Chitanda gasped in awe, and then turned her gaze towards me. Our lady's delighted expression was as though I'd just bought a splendidly bound book for her. The book was bound in a leather cover decorated with finely detailed patterns. Its darkish blue colour emitted an aura of solemnity about it. The title of the book was "Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years". Besides being thick, it was also quite a large book in its length and width.

"May I have a look inside?"

"Sure."

Upon taking out my paperback novel from my shoulder bag, I started searching for the page where I last read. Yet my vision of the novel was quickly replaced by that of high quality pages. It was Chitanda, who upon opening the aforementioned book - "Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years" - placed it on top of my novel in order to show it to me. While I wasn't exactly interested, I didn't ignore it either, and had a quick look at its contents. It's got nothing else on it besides a description of the school's history, and goes as such:

1972

Events in Japan and the World:

- May 15th: Return of Sovereignty of Okinawa. Establishment of Okinawa Prefecture.
- September 29th: Signing of the Joint Communique of Japan and China. Normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- Sudden rise in land and commodities prices this year.

Events in Kamiyama High School

- June 7th: First victory for the Kamiyama High School Archery Club in the Prefectural Newcomers Tournament.
- July 1st: Cancellation of 1st Year Field Trip due to typhoon.
- ☑ October 10th-14th: Cultural Festival.
- ☑ October 30th: Sports Festival.
- ☑ November 16th-19th: 2nd Year Field Trip - Sasebo, Nagasaki.
- ☑ January 23rd-24th: 1st Year Skiing Course.
- February 2nd: Memorial service for 1st Year student Ooide Naoto, who died in car accident.

It was full of such details. It would take a particular set of skills to actually read through all that. I wouldn't go so far as to borrow the book once a week in order to read it all, but I wouldn't be surprised if someone actually did that just for its contents.

"Houtarou, you were just thinking 'I wouldn't be surprised if someone actually borrowed that once a week', weren't you?"

Stop reading my mind, you damn telepath.

Seeing as I didn't rebuke her, Ibara puffed up her particularly small chest and said,

"It's not that simple. You rarely come here to borrow books, so you wouldn't know. Listen carefully, the longest period one can borrow a book is two weeks. So there was no need for someone to borrow a book and return it just a week later."

"And yet this book was returned here every week."

... I see. This is indeed a strange occurrence.

"Is there a way to find out who has borrowed that book?"

"Of course. There's a list detailing the borrowing records behind the cover. Have a look."

Chitanda promptly turned to the cover and saw the list,

"Huh?"

She gasped.

"What's wrong?"

The list contained the names of the borrowers as well as the dates that they had borrowed the book. We could indeed tell that they had borrowed the book once every week. But that was not the reason Chitanda had gasped, as her finger pointed out the list of names to me.

The borrower this week was Machida Kyouko of Class 2-D. Last week, it was Sawakiguchi Misaki of Class 2-F. Two weeks ago, Yamaguchi Ryouko, Class 2-E. Three weeks ago, Shima Saori, Class 2-E. And four weeks ago, Suzuki Yoshie, Class 2-D.

"In other words, it's borrowed by a different person every week?"

"That's not all."

Chitanda showed me the dates. As I looked carefully, the latest date was today. And the previous borrowed date was exactly seven days ago.

"The book was lent out on Fridays."

"Exactly. The book was borrowed and returned on the same day. This Machida Kyouko borrowed the book earlier today, only to return it later. It's the same for the other borrowers for five consecutive weeks. We can also tell the times that they borrowed the book; it was always during lunch time on a Friday. To borrow a book during lunch time and then return it after school, where would they even find the time to read it?"

"..."

"So? You curious?"

Upon returning the book to Ibara, Chitanda nodded her head gently,

"Yes... I'm *very* curious."

She spoke in a firmer tone than usual. Much like last time, her pupils looked as though they'd gotten larger, revealing a strong interest within them.

"Why is it?"

Thanks to Ibara's mystery, our lady's flame of curiosity had been ignited. Satoshi was no use as a water source to douse this fire, as he'd probably play dumb and say "I wouldn't know anything about it." I decided to return to reading my novel.

But I was naive, for I never expected the spear to be pointed right at me. Once again, Chitanda placed the thick book "Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years" on top of my novel and said,

"So what do you think, Oreki-san?"

"Huh, me?"

Rather than his usual gentle smile, Satoshi was now smiling teasingly at me. I instantly realized what had happened. He'd succeeded in ensnaring me in his trap. Curse him and his evil plans.

"Let's think about this together."

"..."

"Shall we, Oreki-san?"

Why? Why me? While I was fine with Chitanda's vigorous curiosity, and while I might admit that Satoshi may have some positive qualities about him, even if it's as a joke, why should I be obliged to play his games and put up with her?

Still, it was true that things have developed to a point where talking my way out of it would have been bothersome. So I had no choice but to reply as such, "... Yeah, I guess it *is* interesting. I'll think about it."

Ibara stood beside Satoshi and asked, "Fuku-chan, is Oreki actually smart?"

"Not at all. He's usually not reliable, but occasionally he can be up to the task."

Why you, getting all cheeky.

And so I began to think.

For a book to be borrowed and returned on the same day for five consecutive weeks by completely different people, the possibility of a coincidence could not be ruled out, but I wasn't going to believe that it was all due to some God of Coincidence. Besides, Chitanda wouldn't have accepted that as an explanation. Getting her to accept things was more important than the truth.

So throwing out the theory that it was a coincidence was a no-brainer. It was also clear that the book was not borrowed for the purpose of reading it, as there wouldn't be time to read it between it being borrowed during lunch time and it being returned after lessons. If you think about it, it would

have been more logical for one to either take it home to read, or just read the book in the library after school. For the latter case, there would have been no need to borrow the book out of the library at all. Thus this book was not borrowed for its original intended purpose.

"... So if the book was not borrowed to be read, then what was it being borrowed for?"

Chitanda answered, "It's heavy, so maybe it's used to compress pickled vegetables?"

Satoshi answered, "Maybe it's used as a shield or something?"

Ibara answered, "It's thick, so it's probably used as a pillow."

I should never have asked you guys.

I decided to switch the focus.

Why was the book being borrowed by a different person every week? Besides being a coincidence, which was already ruled out, there were two points for consideration. First, the girls don't seem to have anything in common, though it's clear that they were using it during Friday afternoons for some sort of ritual, and took turns to borrow it.

As to what ritual, maybe fortune telling? Something like "Your lucky item this month is School History. If you borrow it every Friday afternoon and return it on the same day, you shall meet the man of your dreams"?

... Nah, sounds too silly.

That leaves the second point, that the girls do have something in common.

A look at their names reveal that they're clearly all girls. But just that alone is not enough to establish a common trait. Within Kami High, if five people were randomly picked, there was a high possibility that they could all be girls, but it was already common for people of the same gender to gather together in a co-ed environment anyway.

Their other common trait would be that they're all second years, but their classes are different.

Hmm...?

Now that I think about it...

"What is it? Did you think of something?"

... I may have thought of something, but my thoughts were blown apart by Satoshi's interruption. Now where was I?

Anyway, I'll start from where my thoughts first started to connect,

"There must be a sign or something. For example... maybe they were secretly communicating with each other, where returning the book facing upwards meant 'yes' and facing downwards meant 'no'."

"What were they communicating for?"

"It's just an example. Anything could do."

Chitanda began to tilt her head and started thinking. Yes, that's it, you just slowly digest all this.

Though the one who rebutted me wasn't Chitanda, it was Ibara.

"That would be impossible, look."

Ibara pointed to the Return Box. There were loads of books stacked up inside. I see, there was no way of telling whether that book was returned facing upwards or downwards. The only person who would know which way the book was facing would be the one opening the box, and that would be the Librarian on duty.

Darn. Any careless ideas would end up as easy prey for Ibara to shoot down.

I couldn't think of anything. They might have a spare key to open the box, but I have no way of knowing. Now if only there was some hint. I looked at the well-decorated bound hardback in Ibara's hands and wondered where I could find any declaration of surrender within the book.

This was when Chitanda suddenly entered into my vision. She stretched her body over the counter and just stared at the book that Ibara was holding tightly in front of her chest.

"Eh? Eeh?"

Ibara was dumbstruck at such a reaction. I knew how she felt.

"What is it, Chitanda? Did you find some hidden symbols on the cover or something?"

Chitanda remained motionless and said,

"... This book... seems to have some sort of scent."

She muttered.

"Really? Ibara, can I borrow that? ... I don't smell anything."

"No, I'm sure of it."

"The book itself wouldn't have any odour. Perhaps it's the ink, or that of the library?"

Chitanda shook her head at Satoshi's suggestion.

Both Ibara and Satoshi also took turns to smell the book, but couldn't detect any scent, and both raised their eyebrows and tilted their heads in puzzlement.

"I can't really tell what the scent was, but it was strong, like paint thinner."

"Stop saying something so dangerous."

"It was? ... I couldn't really tell."

Neither could I, but I had a feeling that Chitanda was right. Our lady had been adamant about it, after all. And I never would have thought that she would say it was paint thinner.

If we assume that it is, then... Hmm.

... I may be getting into something here.

But it's bothersome to explain it all.

As I was wondering what to do next, Satoshi had already read my thoughts and said, "Houtarou, your face tells me you've figured something out."

"Eh? Oreki actually has?"

Noticing Ibara turning towards me looking completely skeptical, I nodded and replied honestly,

"Sort of. While I'm not entirely sure... Chitanda, do you feel like getting some exercise? I'd like you to go somewhere for me."

Chitanda was probably the sort who would dash out at once upon telling her where to go, but Satoshi stopped her while smiling.

"Don't be fooled by him, Chitanda-san. You don't wanna end up doing errands for Houtarou now, do you? Or you'll end up doing exactly what he wants. So where is it you were thinking of?"

How reprehensible. Satoshi does tend to say too much whenever Ibara's around. Still, as he wasn't exactly off the mark, I was hardly displeased. It was true that I wouldn't get things done if I don't have someone else do it for me.

"Very well, I'll go along as well. As we didn't have PE lessons due to the rain, I still have some residual energy left inside of me."

Chitanda was bound to come along as I said that. And then...

"Hmm, guess I'll tag along too. I'll be a little shocked if Oreki actually manages to solve this... Fuku-chan, mind filling in my shift for me?"

Ibara exited from the counter upon saying that. Satoshi looked dumbfounded as he replied, "Uh, okay," and kept silent while walking behind the counter. It's been a while since I've seen him this sad.

After being satisfied with the results we'd obtained, we returned to the library.

"How did it go?"

"Fuku-chan, Oreki's a bit strange."

"Of course he is, didn't you know?"

"How did he manage to figure all that out..."

She seemed troubled as she kept muttering "How come". It's as though she sees me as a victor in a sparkling aura, though I would not have been able to sparkle without some luck.

"I'm truly surprised by Oreki-san. I am very curious as to what is inside his head."

An image of Chitanda doing a lobotomy over my head in the basement of a (Gothic) mansion during a stormy night came flashing across my mind. Just imagining it gave me the chills. While I wouldn't say it out loud, Chitanda's ability to smell out such a faint scent when no one else could was a bigger mystery for me.

"If it's Oreki-san, then he could..."

? Then I could what? Please don't tell me I could be used as the ingredients of some cybernetic organism.

Upon swapping places with Ibara at the counter, Satoshi asked, "So, let's hear the explanation. Houtarou, just where did you guys go?"

Placing my elbows on the counter, I replied, "The Arts Preparation Room."

"The Arts Room? At the opposite end of the campus?"

"That's why I didn't want to go myself."

"What did you find there?"

"Just listen."

I repeated what I had explained to Chitanda and Ibara previously,

"This book was used between the fifth and sixth periods every Friday, probably over these two periods altogether. First, no girl would have any

use for such a huge book during lunch break, reading it is also out of the question. And thus, this book was used during lessons which involves different classes from the same year."

My thoughts had previously come to this point before being blown off by Satoshi's interruption. It was the same reason that Chitanda remembered my name after seeing me just once. And where was it that she had seen me?

"It must be either during PE or Arts. No matter how you see it, nobody would have much use for a book during PE. Have a look at the book's cover. Something seems to be accumulated on it; do you notice a nice hue of colour? These five girls were using the book for their lessons, and they decided to take turns borrowing it every week."

Satoshi interrupted and said, "But I don't understand why they would do it once a week, I mean, you could borrow up to two..."

"Stop saying the same stuff as Ibara. You two must really be getting along well to say the same stuff. Satoshi, would you keep a book that you have no intention of reading? It would of course be more efficient to return it to the library instead of lugging it home."

"... I see. And what did you show them there?"

"Surely you should have guessed by now. Paintings, drawn by the students of Classes 2-D, 2-E and 2-F, who held their Arts lessons together."

Over there were various paintings of different styles of similar objects. They were portraits of their own classmates, sitting beside a table decorated with a flower. And in each girls' hand was none other than the elegantly bound hardback, "Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years". It was a quite detailed drawing, and artistically speaking it was rather bewitching.

"Amazing, Houtarou. Then, what was the scent that Chitanda-san smelled?"

"The smell of paint, of course. She figured it out as well, since the Arts Room was filled with painting equipment, after all."

Satoshi began clapping without reservation.

"Wow, that was fantastic. Thanks to you, I've managed to kill some quality time here."

Chitanda smiled gently in approval.

"Yes, it was fun. It felt as though time has flown by quickly."

"I'm not sure how much time has passed to begin with... but I can't believe Oreki actually managed to solve that!"

While they all looked amazed, it was different for me. Ibara was the one who thought the whole thing was strange to begin with, Chitanda was the one who decided to investigate out of curiosity, and Satoshi merely wanted to enjoy the ride; they were all different from me. As they were having a catharsis, I began to wonder if I would have a similar reaction by embracing the Kanya Festival.

How should I put this... Oh well, whatever.

The rain seemed to be getting weaker. Guess it's time to go home.

As I was about to pick up my shoulder bag, Chitanda stopped me.

"Ah, we can't go without waiting."

"What? Is there something else?"

I noticed Satoshi and Ibara staring at me coldly. Did I do something wrong?

"Oreki, just what did you come here for to begin with?"

To solve the mystery of the popular book that no one ever reads...

No, wait. That's it! The anthology. Satoshi laughed.

"Now come on guys. Houtarou will occasionally have a few screws loose."

"Occasionally? Fuku-chan, you're being too kind."

Argh, I've just acted stupidly in front of you two.

Ibara looked as though she was about to go on when a voice came from behind the counter.

"Ibara-san, thanks for the good work. You may go home now."

"Ah, yes of course. Are you leaving as well, Itoikawa-sensei?"

It was a teacher, and though I'd never seen her before, I knew she was the Head Librarian. For a woman nearing the end of middle-age, she was quite short in stature. A glance at her name tag revealed her full name - Itoikawa Youko.

Upon the arrival of the Head Librarian, Satoshi immediately got down to business.

"Sensei, I'm Fukube Satoshi of the Classics Club. We're planning on publishing an essay anthology and would like to see the back issues for reference, but we can't seem to find them in the open shelves. So we're wondering if we may please search the archives for them?"

"The Classics Club? ... Essay anthology?"

Itoikawa seemed surprised as she raised her voice. She probably thought that the Classics Club had been abolished or something.

"You're with the Classics Club? I see... I'm sorry, but the library does not hold any anthologies that I know of."

"Eeh, then what about the archives?"

"There aren't any there either."

"Maybe something has been overlooked..."

"I don't think that's possible."

Strangely, she answered quite firmly. I see no reason for the Head Librarian to hide anything from us. Perhaps the archives have been overhauled recently?

Upon receiving a negative answer, Satoshi had no choice but to give up.

"Is that so? I understand... What do we do now, Chitanda-san?"

"... This is indeed troubling."

Chitanda looked at me with a depressed look. Even if you give me that look, there's nothing I can do besides shrugging my shoulders.

"I'm sure we'll find them eventually. Let's go home." I said, and as I picked up my shoulder bag, Ibara said coldly, "You sure are quite laid back, looking all relaxed after solving a problem."

Just because I've solved a problem doesn't mean I'm all relaxed. Ibara, your accusation is way off the mark. Though that's what my mind was saying, it was pointless to say it out loud, so I shrugged my shoulders.

"Yes, you're right. Let's go home... We did get something worthwhile."

Chitanda said something totally incomprehensible.

Anyway, our business was done here. This time, I hung my bag over my shoulder and walked out to find the rain had stopped, and rays of sunlight were shining through the clouds. As I turned and looked around, I could hear Chitanda whispering the same thing again,

"That's right, if it's Oreki-san, then he could..."

4 - The Descendants of the Eventful Classics Club

It was on a Sunday that I was invited out by Chitanda. She said she wanted to see me outside school, though she counted on me to arrange where to meet, so as a result, here I was waiting at the "Cafe Pineapple Sandwich". The coffee shop, which serves the sourest seasoned Kilimanjaro coffee I've ever known, was decorated in a sombre dark brown hue. The conspicuous advertising board outside was quite hard to miss.

This coffee shop was quiet as there was no radio or TV being broadcast. Though it was indeed a pleasant environment, it was quite a boring place to wait for someone. There were only a few minutes before the appointed time, so I was getting a bit fidgety about Chitanda not yet arriving as I stared at my cup of coffee within the compartmentalized table I was seated at.

Finally, Chitanda arrived, and according to my watch, right on time at half past one. It's quite a small coffee shop, so she quickly found me. Dressed in a mostly white one-piece dress, she came over and got herself seated. One could say there's no other person more well-dressed than this casually dressed Chitanda.

"Sorry for calling you out on such short notice."

"It's fine," I replied as I emptied my cup of coffee, and then called for the waiter. Chitanda had a look at the menu and said, "I'll have a Vienna Cocoa, please."

She decided on something sweet. As an ordinary high school student, I wasn't wealthy enough to make another order myself.

Before getting to the main agenda, we had some small talk, which started with Chitanda's favourable impression with this coffee shop. I then commented on how a person like her who doesn't order coffee in a coffee shop was like a person who visits Ueno Zoo but doesn't go to see the giant pandas. As Chitanda began listing many examples of coffee which were weak in caffeine, her Vienna Cocoa had arrived. I was startled to see the amount of cream on her cup. Seems like she has a sweet tooth.

Chitanda began to use the spoon to stir in the cream. She seemed to be enjoying herself while she was at it. At this rate, she'll just be drinking her

coffee and engaging in small talk all day before going home. Being half serious and half fearful about that happening, I decided to get the ball rolling.

"So, what do you want?"

"Huh?"

Is this the attitude you should have for asking people to take time out of their holy weekends?

"What is it that you asked me out for?"

Silently sipping her coffee and muttering "That was delicious", Chitanda tilted her head and said, "Well, it was you who chose to meet at this place."

"That's it, I'm going home."

"Ah! Please wait!"

Placing her spoon and cup down, Chitanda quickly sat upright and said, "I'm sorry. I, I was a bit nervous."

Though she looked as though she was calming herself down, her expression was hardly stiff to begin with. It would seem it's her nature to just blurt anything out whenever she's nervous. So I decided to tease her by asking, "Nervous? You have something to confess to me?"

Upon saying that, I quickly noticed that such a generic joke had a subtle effect on her.

"No, I..."

As though trying to conceal her embarrassment, she looked hesitant as she slowly nodded.

I started to panic, and quickly called for the waiter.

"... I'd like another coffee, please."

Not minding my reaction, Chitanda silently spoke.

"While it might be a confession, it's more of a request I have for you. In truth this is my problem alone, so I don't know if I'm justified to make such a request. So, would you please hear my story first?"

Chitanda was no longer staring at her cup of cocoa. Is that so... Though I'm no good with such solemnness, I replied, "Okay, let's hear it."

"Thank you."

And so, after taking a gulp, Chitanda began to slowly speak.

"... I have an uncle, he was my mother's older brother. His name was Sekitani Jun. Ten years ago he went on a voyage to Malaysia, but he has been missing since seven years ago.

"When I was young... no, I'm probably still young right now — ten years ago, I was quite attached to my uncle. From what I can remember, he could answer any question that I could ask him. As a child, what he said naturally sounded amazing to me, though I can't exactly remember anymore the things he told me. The image I have of my uncle is that there was nothing that he didn't know of."

"Sounds like an amazing fellow."

"He was knowledgeable and eloquent, though I don't know if that's still true now."

I smiled and replied half-jokingly, "Well, at least you knew he was when he was still around. I have two to three uncles myself, though none of them are missing. So why are you asking a request of me? You're not expecting me to go to Malaysia to search for him, are you?"

"No. My uncle was last seen in the Bengali region, umm, in India, that is. What I wanted to request from Oreki-san is... to help me remember what it was that my uncle said to me."

Chitanda finished her sentence upon saying that, which seemed appropriate, as I had no idea what she had just said. She's asking me to help her remember what her uncle told her?

"... That's too ridiculous."

"I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I? My memories relating to my uncle come from my childhood, so I can't exactly remember them myself. But, there's this one event that left a strong impression in my mind. I really want to recall that moment."

As her lips were getting dry, Chitanda took a sip of her cocoa. She then continued in a lower volume, "It was when I was still in kindergarten. For some reason, I managed to hear my uncle mention something about a 'classics club'. I always thought this 'jurassics club' had something to do with dinosaurs, so I became interested in this 'classics club' of his^[1]."

"Jurassics Club", "Classics Club", it was a silly pun, though kids that age usually pronounce things wrong. Maybe that's why. This must be when Chitanda Eru, the incarnation of Curiosity itself, was born.

"I heard many stories about my uncle's 'classics club'. Then one day, I went looking for my uncle to ask him about something concerning the 'classics

club'. Normally he would answer me as usual, but on that day, he seemed reluctant to answer. He began wringing his hands with this regretful look, and when he finally calmed down, he answered my question. Upon hearing his answer, I..."

"What happened?"

"... I cried. Whether it was something fearful or sad, I cried out loud. My mother was so startled that she came to see what was going on, and that's all I could remember. The last thing I can recall is that my uncle didn't come to console me like he normally would."

"You were shocked?"

"Yes, a bit, I believe. I've remembered that day all this time. Afterwards, yes, sometime during Junior High School, I began to be bothered by that event. Why did my uncle look so regretful? Why did he not console me? ... Oreki-san, what do you think?"

Upon being asked, I started thinking. Why would a person who would so patiently answer every single question asked by a young kid leave her crying by herself at that moment?

I quickly figured out the reason, and explained with as much composure as I could muster, "Your uncle told you something he could not take back. He didn't want to lie to a kid, and probably wanted you to know that what he said was true."

Chitanda gasped and smiled.

"Yes, that's what I thought of as well."

She said while looking straight at me... Umm, when's my coffee gonna come?

"Upon realizing that, I began to wonder in earnest just what it was that he had told me that day. So I began to take things into action, first by attempting to reenact the environment of that day. I sneaked into the residence of the Sekitanis, whom we have become estranged with."

She's definitely the sort that would go to all lengths in order to get things done.

"I see. So that's what you meant by 'personal reasons' when you said why you joined the Classics Club."

Chitanda nodded.

"Yes. I wasn't aware that the Classics Club was nearly abolished until recently. I knew it wasn't easy, but I didn't expect that there would be no one left behind who would know the truth. I considered asking the teachers,

but the teachers who were around when my uncle was a student 33 years ago were no longer at the school."

"So, why are you asking me to help you?"

"That's because..."

As Chitanda stopped her sentence midway, the waiter arrived with my coffee. Working mechanically, the bearded waiter withdrew my empty cup and replaced it with a new one. After the waiter had left, Chitanda sipped her cup of cocoa as though remembering everything and said, "... During the incident with the clubroom key, and the library mystery that Ibara-san raised, you have managed to deduce their solutions in ways beyond my imagination. While it may be shameless to say this, I believe Oreki-san is the one who can figure out the answer to my question."

I felt myself frowning.

"You overestimate me. I just relied on some insight, which required some luck in itself."

"Then I'm seeking help from this luck of yours."

"I don't think I can help you."

The reason I didn't think I could help her was firstly, I had no obligation to assist her in such a bothersome errand; secondly, if I couldn't figure out anything, then I would let Chitanda down, as well as feel very helpless myself. This wasn't some quiz show, but merely Chitanda's exaggerated way of finding out the meaning of a moment in her life. You expect an energy saver like me to bear such a responsibility? You must be kidding me.

"Why does it have to be me? Surely there are others who could help you."

Chitanda's eyes widened. Without knowing the meaning behind that, I continued, "Wouldn't it be more efficient to rely on more people to help out? You could ask Satoshi, Ibara, or other friends of yours."

There was no response. Chitanda merely remained silent at my refusal. She lowered her head and slowly muttered, "I... Oreki-san, I'm not the sort of person who would tell everyone about my past."

"..."

"I... I've never told anyone else about this story before."

I was taken aback. I see, now it makes sense.

Why would Chitanda purposely call me out on a Sunday just to talk to me alone? The answer was simple, she did not want many people to know

about her uncle's story. Chitanda had decided to put her trust in me, a person she barely knew, and yet I had told her to "rely on more people".

It would of course be embarrassing for many people to find out such private information. Who wouldn't have their own deepest secret that they want to cherish?

I felt myself going red, and I lowered my head.

"... I'm sorry."

Seeing Chitanda smile at me, I felt that she'd probably forgiven me.

Silence then followed. Chitanda seemed to be waiting for me to speak. Yet I couldn't find anything appropriate to say. The steam from my cup of coffee rose between us. Chitanda's Vienna Cocoa had gone cold by now, as no steam came from her cup.

I held my cup in my hands. As though to break the awkwardness, Chitanda said with a gentle expression, "I've said something unreasonable. I know I've involved you in something I shouldn't, but yet, I..."

"..."

"Oreki-san, when you managed to solve my queries... you probably reminded me a lot of my uncle. No offense to my uncle, but you too have managed to answer my questions. That's why... Oh no, I'm being too selfish here."

"You still have three years of high school remaining, so you could take your time finding out. If you're still troubled, then I won't necessarily stand aside and not help."

Chitanda slowly shook her head.

"I wish to remember what happened that day with my uncle before he dies. I wish to find out before his funeral why my uncle had told me something that he could not take back, and what it was that he told me."

"Before he dies?"

What a strange way of describing a person. A dead person would already be dead, while a missing person isn't exactly dead.

... No wait.

That's right, people who have gone missing, *are* dead.

"It has been seven years since my uncle, Sekitani Jun, has gone missing. In case you didn't know, people who have been missing for seven years are declared legally dead... The Sekitani family has been informed of such by the

Missing Persons Bureau and will be holding a funeral in due time. So I wish to settle my questions regarding my uncle before then."

Chitanda sighed after informing me as such, and then turned her gaze outside the window. I followed her gaze as well, and saw only a generic street view.

I took another sip of my coffee. It seemed Chitanda was done speaking.

I began to think.

There is a memory that needs to be remembered, and it was a memory worth remembering. This matter was hard to define according to my motto. For someone like me who was used to dodging crisis after crisis, I don't have many memories worth remembering myself.

However, for Chitanda, she would seek to recollect any memories that she may have forgotten. Now that I think about it, that curiosity of hers is what's driving her to dig for her own memories, so it wasn't strange for her to be digging into her own past. She was digging not just for her uncle's sake, but for herself as well. And what would happen if she is not able to achieve what she had intended?

As I was thinking, a passage from my sister's letter flashed across my mind: "After all, you don't have anything better to do, do you?"

... Indeed. I am Houtarou the energy saver. I will not do anything if I don't have to.

In that case, it wouldn't be too strange if I were to help someone do something that needs to be done, right?

I placed my cup down and flicked my fingers as I felt a strange feeling within me. The ceramic cup made a thudding sound as it touched the table, causing Chitanda to turn her gaze away from the streets and towards me. I slowly spoke as though trying to catch her attention.

"I will not be responsible for what you intend to do."

"?"

"That's why I won't say that I'll accept your request. However, I will take your story into consideration, and if any hints should come my way, I'll let you know right away. That'll save me the trouble of having to explain too much."

"... Okay."

"If that's fine with you, then I'll help you."

Chitanda quickly sat up straight, and bowed at a perfect 45 degree angle.

"Thank you so much. This may cause you a lot of trouble, but I am gratefully in your debt."

Cause me a lot of trouble, huh?

I turned my face away where Chitanda couldn't see and smiled softly. I was quite amazed with myself for not refusing a request from someone. If Satoshi ever finds out, I wonder what he'll say about it. He'd probably widen his eyes in surprise, and express his amazement using vocabulary I've never heard of before, saying something like, "But Houtarou's the sort who would turn down a request at once."

I wonder how I should explain myself to him then.

I went into deep thought while being thanked many times by Chitanda. I'd already finished two cups of coffee, but her cup of cocoa had already gone cold.

5 - The Hidden Seal of the Pedigree Classics Club

While Kamiyama High School does provide curriculum for university entrance exams, it does not particularly do much to improve its university entrance rankings. It only holds mock exams for prospective university students once or twice annually, and they do not hold extra lessons during holidays. All in all, it was a pretty laid back school.

Even so, Kamiyama High still has regular exams. If a high-school student's life is rose-coloured, then the exam halls would be his natural enemy. And so the Classics Club activities had come to a halt as club activities are prohibited during the End of Semester Exams for the First Semester. Though it's not like we have much to do anyway, we still had to hand the club room key over to the school.

Today is the final day of the exams. I laid down on my bed in my own room and stared at the ceiling. And as usual, there was nothing particularly different about this white ceiling.

In terms of exam results, the members of the Classics Club yielded some interesting revelations.

First, Fukube Satoshi. Though he's well-versed in all sorts of useless trivial knowledge, he doesn't have much interest in regular studies. As the exams have just ended today, I can't exactly tell how he performed, but I do know that he was terrible in the Mid-Term Tests. At any rate, back then Satoshi explained to me, "That's because I was busy studying why Japanese people nowadays no longer write their kanji in the cursive style^[1]." If Satoshi thinks something is important, then it must be important enough for him. No disrespect to him, but in the long-term, I think it probably sounds foolish. Though I don't think Satoshi would care one bit. If I call him a free soul because of it, he'd probably take it as a compliment. To put it simply, he's just a generic fool.

Though she's normally with the Manga Studies Club, in order to continue pursuing Satoshi, Ibara Mayaka too has joined the Classics Club. She's probably the hard-working type. As she would usually make sure to check up on any mistakes made, her grades are in the upper half of the class. However, devoting so much time to studying does not seem to improve her grades at all. To put it simply, Ibara's a bit neurotic — you could say she's a

perfectionist. Though her tongue may be sharp, her downside is probably that she is too obsessed with perfection, and would end up struggling to find the perfect answers to her exam questions. I think she applies the same standards to herself as well.

Then there's Chitanda Eru, who stands out among the rest with her high scores. A look at the score ranking board reveals she's ranked 6th in the entire grade. Though she doesn't seem satisfied with that, or even the high school curriculum for that matter. She once told me she wasn't content with just learning the parts, she wanted to learn the entire system. I had absolutely no idea what she meant by that. Though her words were vague, I could tell why this lady was so intent on getting her curiosity resolved. For example, the case involving her uncle — she probably wanted to find out the entire "system" regarding the information concerning what her uncle said to her back then. She's the sort that wants to find out the cause by all means.

As for me, my grades were normal.

Out of 350 people, I ranked 175th. As though it was some sort of prank, I was ranked right in the middle. I was not concerned about Chitanda's curiosity getting her good grades or Satoshi's eccentricity getting him bad grades, nor did I think much about Ibara being unhappy with the mistakes she's made. While I wasn't that laid back as to not study for the exams, my studying was lukewarm at best. Occasionally, I would get people telling me how much I've changed, but to me, it simply means they aren't really that observant. I am positioned below the cream of the crop and above the bottom of the heap. I have no desire to go either up or down. I see, so that's why Satoshi said that he can't think of anything apart from grey for the colour of my high-school life.

Of course, colour isn't confined to academic grades. There's also club activities, sports, hobbies, romance... The things that constitute our humanity. There is the saying that one can't see the forest for the trees, after all, and one result cannot be used to generalize for the whole picture. Though the Japanese dictionary defined life in high-school as rose-coloured, these roses would still need to be planted in the right places in order to blossom.

Let's just say I'm not the suitable type of soil for roses to grow in.

As I lay on my bed thinking all these things, I heard a sound coming from downstairs. It sounded like a letter had arrived.

After making sure it was indeed a letter, I was dumbfounded. The envelope was covered in red, blue and white stripes, that could only be international mail. After checking the recipient name was correct, I concluded that the only person who could send international mail to the Oreki residence was Oreki Tomoe. Now where was this sent from... Istanbul?

I opened the letter right there and found many letters inside, one of which was for me.

Dear Houtarou,

I am currently in Istanbul. Due to some mishaps I'm hiding out at the Japanese consulate, so I haven't been seeing much of the city yet.

I'm sure it's an amazing city. If I could take a time machine and visit this place in the past, I think I'd want to try to lock the city gates myself, perhaps I'd change history as a result. I'm no historian, so I'm no good at speculating at these "what ifs".

It's an interesting trip, I'm sure I'll look back ten years from now and view every day I'm out here without regret.

So how's the Classics Club? Have the members increased?

Do not be discouraged even if it's just you alone! Solitude helps make a man grow stronger.

If there are other people, then excellent. It helps to improve one's interaction with others.

Anyway, I'm writing because there's something that I'm concerned about.

Have you (guys) started work on publishing an essay anthology yet? The Classics Club always publishes one every year, so I'm wondering if you're continuing with that.

If you are, I figured you're probably at a loss for what to write. After all, the anthologies aren't stored in the library.

You should be able to find the back issues inside an old chemical safe in the club room. The key's broken already, so you can just open the box right away.

I'll call you when I arrive at Pristina.

With love, Tomoe.

Hiding in the Japanese consulate? Just what have you done this time, Sis? Anyway, it's not that I'm worried. The details are probably written in the letter for my old man. Now where have I heard of Pristina? I can't quite remember. Since it's my sister going, it's no doubt some ancient battlefield or something.

Anyway, I couldn't help but sigh. Does my sister have some sort of intelligence network that collects information about my activities? And I didn't know the Classics Club kept their back issues so secretly for generations either. Indeed, we were looking for the back issues but couldn't find where they were.

It was only a few days since Chitanda tasked me with a personal errand of hers, though she also has another errand for us as President of the Classics Club - the publishing of the essay anthology. Chitanda looked troubled when she found out the library archives did not store the back issues, but if my sister is right, then it could be of great help.

If the purpose is the result itself, then achieving the said result will fulfill that purpose. Though I sense another layer being added to such a bothersome definition, it just felt cruel if I withheld such information. As usual, Oreki Tomoe is messing with my life.

At any rate, I stuffed the letter in the pocket of my uniform trousers that I hung in the closet.

The following day after classes, I went straight towards the club room. The weather was rather pleasant for a relaxing day after the end of the exams, that one would be in a mood to join any club. The training sounds of the sports teams could be heard from the sports ground, while music was being played by the Brass Band, Light Music Club, Japanese Traditional Music Club, etc. While the sports teams are the most visible of the lot, the Kanya Festival is better known for its flurry of activities organized by the arts-related clubs. During this time of day, the Special Block which holds these arts clubs would be full of people.

And within the uppermost corner of this Special Block lies the Geology Room, where Chitanda and Ibara were. Though they've only just met during the case of the peculiar library book, it seems like they're getting along well with each other already. Today they were sitting facing each other, as though they were engaged in some conversation. As summer had arrived, the summer uniforms that they wore felt breezy. Ibara's tanned arms from her short sleeve shirt were in contrast to Chitanda's pale white arms. It was already the season when the sun is shining more often, yet our lady here doesn't seem to have much melanin in her. I tilted my head over to hear what the girls were talking about.

"In other words, the articles need to be on topic."

"Do you mean we can count on others for our anthology?"

"Don't you worry, I think I can get some connections within the Manga Studies Club."

"Can you do that?"

Ah, talking about the anthology, huh? Well, good luck.

Suddenly, Chitanda's body went stiff as she covered her face with her hands.

What's happening?

"... Ah-choo!"

She sneezed. And she's doing it in an old-fashioned quiet way.

"Ah-choo! Ah-choo!"

"What's wrong? You have cold? Or is it hay fever?"

"... Ah, I'm feeling better now. This is quite embarrassing, but it seems to me that I have caught a summer cold..."

Hmm, a summer cold is tough. Come to think of it, her voice sounded different from usual.

Anyway, I decided to call them out.

"Hey, Chitanda, Ibara,"

"Ah, Oreki-san,"

"Ibara, is the Manga Studies Club okay with you being here?"

"Yup, it's all settled. What, you have a problem with me?"

Why should I?

Anyway.

I decided to cut the niceties and went straight to the point as I took out my sister's letter from my trouser pocket,

"My sis used to be with the Classics Club, so she wrote me a letter showing us where we could find the anthology back issues."

Chitanda merely looked puzzled. It seems she still didn't understand.

"I know where we can find the Classics Club anthology back issues."

She bit her lips many times while struggling to find the right words.

"Is,"

She was so lost for words that her eyes went wide.

"Is that true!?"

"Of course it's true. What do I gain by lying to you anyway?"

As though affirming what I said, Chitanda's thin lips broke into a smile. While the elegantly fine lady of the Chitanda clan wasn't exactly grinning from ear to ear, she was clearly quite happy. Even if I were to obtain something that I desired a lot, I would not be able to make such a face. Compared to this, the Chitanda I saw in the Cafe Pineapple Sandwich with her deep expressions felt like a different person altogether.

"I see, the anthologies, huh..."

I could hear her whispering softly,

"... Tee hee, back issues..."

This Chitanda Eru can be quite a dangerous person.

However, Ibara raised her eyebrow and questioned, "Are you sure about that? Why would someone write a letter just to say that?"

A good question. No one in their right mind would think of seeking information about where to find stuff concerning the Cultural Festival in a letter from Istanbul. But this was indeed a letter from my sis, and no one could ever guess just what it is that Oreki Tomoe would consider important.

"Well, fact is I've got the letter here, so you'll be able to tell whether it's true or not. Wanna read?"

I unfolded the letter and laid it on the table for Ibara and Chitanda to see. As they followed every word in the letter, they gradually went quiet. The first to break the silence was Chitanda.

"... Does your sister like to visit Turkey?"

"She likes to visit the world."

"Such an amazing sister you have."

While her interest was drawn by the curious part of the letter, that's not where I wanted her to look.

"'I'll look back ten years from now and view every day I'm out here with much nostalgia.' Ahh, such a melancholic sentence."

Well, I agree, but that's not it either.

As they read on, they both opened their mouths at the same time.

"... The chemical safe?"

"The chemical safe, huh?"

Ibara looked around the Geology Room, and then put her arms on her waist and puffed her chest.

"Hmm, I don't see anything like that here."

"Guess so."

That's not hard to figure out. Though Chitanda seemed to have gone pale all of a sudden.

"Eh!? T, then w, where are... the anthologies..."

"Chi-chan! Calm down, calm down!"

As to who Ibara was calling Chi-chan, I could think of no one else but Chitanda. "Chi-chan", that Ibara sure has given her quite a cute nickname. So her sharp tongue is not used against Chitanda, huh? Though it is indeed difficult to be hostile to a person like Chitanda anyway.

I waved my sis's letter to a now calmed-down Chitanda and said,

"Chitanda, this letter said 'old chemical safe in the club room'. It's been two years since my sis graduated from here. The club room has probably changed during that time."

"Ah... Is that so?"

"So, Oreki, do you know where the club room was two years ago?"

To avoid any oversight, I made sure to visit the staff room beforehand.

"I've asked the supervising teacher, and he said it was in the Biology Lecture Room."

"You sure are quite prepared for this."

"Well, it's efficient."

"How enthusiastic of you."

That's not exactly true, I'm normally not that enthusiastic.

"The Biology Lecture Room... that's just one floor below us. Now that we know, shall we head over there?"

Having said that, Chitanda left the room at once.

If there's anyone that's enthusiastic, it's her.

The Biology Room was, as Chitanda said, right under the Geology Room. If the Geology Room, located in the corner of the Special Block, was the remotest region of Kamiyama High, then the Biology Room, located on the third floor, would also be considered a backwater area. While I did say the Special Block was full of people, there were exceptions. Like the Geology Room, which was hardly surrounded by any other club rooms, was extremely quiet. It seems the Biology Room was the same as well. While the corridor was lively with people, the path towards the Biology Room was full of empty classrooms, and there was no one else heading towards it besides us.

Along the way, Chitanda sneezed many times.

"Is your cold that bad?"

"Please don't worry too much about me. I might not be able to stop sneezing, but it's just a sensitive nose... Ah-choo!"

I don't know. If it were me, I would have felt terrible sneezing this many times. As expected of our lady here, who can be extremely modest.

Walking ahead of us, Ibara turned her head around and said to us,

"Oreki, do you have the key with you?"

"Nope, someone else seems to have borrowed it."

"Ah-choo! ... The key's been borrowed? Does that mean the Biology Room is currently being used by some club?"

"As long as it isn't some fool that's borrowed it, it could be possible."

"Oreki-san... it's rude to call people fools."

I got scolded. If she gets upset by even that, then not even Satoshi or Ibara would have been able to retort, so I smiled bitterly and looked around, and something by the corridor wall entered my field of vision. I wonder what that was. Neither Chitanda nor Ibara seemed to notice it... It was a small box, and as it was painted in the same white colour as the corridor walls, it

was rather inconspicuous. Looking at the opposite side of the corridor, I saw another similar box. I Wonder if someone left these behind? As it didn't seem valuable, I paid no more attention to it. Bending down to pick up something that's worth less than one yen is not worth the effort, as the energy spent is more or less equivalent to one yen. So it's basic common sense for energy savers like me.

We now stood before the Biology Room. While considering whether to knock or not, Chitanda had already reached out for the door knob.

"Huh?"

The door wouldn't open.

"It's locked."

"So it seems."

The two girls turned to look at me, Chitanda looking concerned while Ibara stared coldly. It's bothersome to have them to look at me with such eyes.

"No, I really don't have the key with me. So I wouldn't know why the door's locked."

Once again, Ibara tried to open the door, but could only hear the lock creaking. Quite aptly, Chitanda said what I was about to say, "... Again?"

Yes, that again.

"Chi-chan, what do you mean?"

"Umm, it happened in April..."

I don't think Chitanda knows this, but it seems Kami High's classroom doors are jinxed. As Chitanda recounted that story in April, I began to think of how to get around this situation without a key.

"... And that's how it was."

"Hmm, so Oreki managed to do all that, huh?"

I turned my heels around and shouted through the door jokingly,

"IS ANYONE IN THERE?"

Of course, I expected no answer.

However, there was an answer. The blunt sound of the door being unlocked was heard.

"Yes?"

The door then opened from the inside.

Standing there was a male student wearing a thin shirt and uniform trousers. He was quite tall and slender. Though he looked more like the intelligentsia type than the athletic type of person. Upon identifying our grades from the colour of my collar, he smiled politely and said, "Oh, sorry about that. I had the door locked. You guys interested in joining the Wall Newspaper Club?"

If you're inside then you should've opened the door right away, dammit. Rather than what I was thinking, I said, "This is the Wall Newspaper Club?"

"That's right. Aren't you here to join?"

The male student shut the door upon coming out of the room. At that moment I smelled some sort of alcoholic disinfectant odour coming from him. It seems our intelligentsia fellow here has a penchant for deodorants. He raised his brows upon seeing me twitch my nose at his deodorant odour, as though saying "You got a problem with that?" Though he quickly reverted to his courteous manner and said, "Then, how may I help you?"

We exchanged glances with each other, and decided it was best for our President Chitanda to speak.

"Good afternoon. I'm Chitanda Eru, President of the Classics Club. You must be Toogaito-sempai from Class 3-E, right?"

The guy called Toogaito raised his brow in amazement,

"How do you know my name?"

A good question. Anyone would be amazed if they were suddenly addressed by name by a complete stranger. After all, that's what I felt back in April. And like back then, Chitanda merely smiled gently.

"We met at the Manninbashi mansion last year."

"Manninbashi... Wait a minute, you said your name's Chitanda, could you be related to Chitanda-san from Kanda?"

"Yes, he is my father. Thank you for taking care of him."

...Hmm, this feels like a high-society reunion. I knew that as an old clan, the Chitandas were farmland owners, but I never expected them to be so well-connected. It seems this world that I've never seen before really does exist. Come to think of it, Satoshi did mention something about the old clans of Kamiyama, and the Toogaito clan was amongst them.

"Ah, no, the pleasure's all mine. I see, you're with the Chitandas."

"Yes... Ah-choo!"

"Summer cold? Must be bad for you. Take care of yourself."

Upon learning that Chitanda Eru was from the Chitanda Clan with their large farmlands, Toogaito's attitude changed in a strange way. While he was still courteous, his gaze was now more stiff. Was he scared of Chitanda or something? I can't begin to imagine, but it does seem there is some sort of power influence between the old clans. Maybe it's just me, but Toogaito didn't seem to meet Chitanda's gaze and he spoke as though picking his words carefully.

"Well, what is it?"

On the other hand, Chitanda didn't seem to mind Toogaito's reaction and said, "Yes, actually, I heard that the back issues for the Classics Club's essay anthology were stored here in the Biology Room. This used to be the club room for the Classics Club, right?"

"... It was when I was still in first year. Though they moved the club rooms all over the place last year."

"Then, do you know where the anthologies are?"

Toogaito paused for a moment before replying, "Nope, never seen them."

Quietly listening to their conversation, Ibara turned and looked at me, to which I nodded gently. Anyone with an intuition would realize that Toogaito was behaving strangely.

"I see..."

Though she has an amazing memory, Chitanda's intuition level was below average. And so Chitanda looked dejected and was about to leave when Ibara interrupted, "Excuse me, Sempai, do you mind if we search around for them?"

"And you are?"

"Ibara Mayaka of the Classics Club. Since you have no use for the anthologies, maybe you haven't noticed them before, right?"

Though I see no point in doing so, I decided to go on a fool's errand and back them up.

"We'll try to do so without obstructing your club activities. Or is that too much trouble for you?"

"Please."

"I ask of you as well."

Upon our constant barrage of requests, Toogaito gave a sullen look.

"Well, I would rather not have outsiders in the club room..."

Upon hearing that line, Ibara quickly jumped on it.

"But Sempai, while this is a club room, this is also a classroom, right?"

I held back my laughter, since Ibara was basically saying "You have no right to refuse students entry into the school classrooms". Toogaito looked rather troubled as a result, but as Ibara was rather persistent, he finally relented.

"... Alright then. You may come in, but, just try not mess anything up."

And so the President of the Wall Newspaper Club opened the door to the Biology Room.

The room we entered was designed in the exact same layout as the Geology Room, from the blackboard, the chairs, the table, to the cleaning tools, they were generally the same... Though it does have one extra door. Above that door was a sign that read "Biology Preparation Room". In the fourth floor, this would be where the storage room was, and it was not possible to enter it directly from the Geology Room.

There were hardly any other members in the Wall Newspaper Club today. Though Toogaito explained, "We normally have four members, though as there's no activities today, only I'm here to think about what to publish for the Kanya Festival."

If I remember correctly, the Kanya Festival starts in October. So about two and a half months from now.

"What's the difference between the Wall Newspaper Club and the Newspaper Club?"

Chitanda asked a totally irrelevant question, which Toogaito answered courteously.

"There are three periodicals published in Kami High. There's the 'Seiryuu' distributed to the classrooms every other month; the 'Kami High Student Council News', posted outside the Student Council office in irregular intervals; and the 'Kami High Monthly', which publishes every month except August and December, and is posted on the notice board by the school entrance. We're in charge of the 'Kami High Monthly'."

"Who publishes the other two?"

"The 'Seiryuu' is by the Newspaper Club, while the 'Kami High Student Council News' is of course by the Student Council. Though we have the longest history of the three periodicals. The 'Kami High Monthly' will be

reaching its four hundredth issue soon, the other two haven't even reached their one hundredth."

Four hundred issues, huh? Besides us, the Wall Newspaper Club too has a long-standing tradition of its own. Come to think of it, if Chitanda's uncle was with the Classics Club 33 years ago, then the Classics Club has been around for at least 33 years. No matter how tumultuous my life might become, it surely cannot compare to the history of the Classics Club. Then again, it's not like my life has been tumultuous so far.

"Doesn't seem to be in this room."

Ibara concluded after looking around the room. As the Biology Room was rather empty, it was hard for her to miss anything. That leaves the Preparation Room. I asked about entering that room, "May we please check the Preparation Room as well?"

"... Yeah, go ahead."

Upon hearing Toogaito reply behind me, I entered the room, and could hear the sound of paper fluttering as well as the sound of some motor. I wonder what that was.

As expected, the Preparation Room was a small room, about one third the size of the Biology Room.

This room was originally made to store teaching equipment for Biology lessons, though right now only microscopes could be found on the shelves. As Kami High is more focused on theory learning more than practical experiments, it would seem most of the other experiment tools and equipment were stored away in another separate room. As a result, this became a tool room for the Wall Newspaper Club.

There was an amateur looking camera, a collection of pens of various thicknesses and colours, cardboard boxes cluttered beside a photocopier, and a small speaker. As for the item that most caught our eyes, it was the makeshift table in the centre of the narrow room. Rather than a table, it was merely a thick plywood board placed on top of a cardboard box. On top of it were spread a bunch of B1 papers with scribbles that can only be read by their author, with a heavy-looking metallic pen case placed on top of them. The fluttering noise came from these papers being blown by the wind.

Wind?

There was wind inside the room. Though the window was open, the wind came from indoors. That must be where the motor sound came from. It was hard to spot as it was placed beside the stack of cardboard boxes, but there

was a small electric fan in front of the makeshift table and opposite the window, and its wind speed was turned to the maximum.

There was something else that the wind was blowing on. Hanging by the window was a Kami High male summer uniform shirt. It was simply hung there casually.

"...?"

"Oreki, what do you think?"

I turned around and found Chitanda and Ibara standing by the Preparation Room entrance.

Ah yes, we had to look for the chemical safe.

Still, with things being placed everywhere in such a narrow room, there was no way to search like that. Simply by observation alone, there didn't seem to be anything resembling a chemical safe. It should be an old-styled box with the lock damaged. Perhaps I did see it but didn't notice it properly.

Hmm...

I crossed my arms and stepped away from the room and asked Toogaito, who had been watching us, "Do you know why the club rooms were moved around last year?"

"Nope. Maybe they were trying to fill out the rooms emptied by clubs that no longer existed?"

"How many boxes did you bring in when you moved in here?"

Toogaito thought for a while before replying, "... Now that you mention it, how many boxes did we move?"

"The cardboard boxes?"

"Yeah."

I see. Then it should be there. I'd nearly forgotten that the Toogaito clan was also quite a prestigious clan; it would make sense once I considered the circumstances concerning his clan.

I'd more or less figured out where the anthologies were, though obtaining them would be a problem... Let's try setting up a trap. I turned to face Toogaito.

"Sempai, since there are so many things lying around, it would be quite tedious to search like that. This might trouble you a bit, but do you mind if we ask Ooide-sensei to come help us search as well?"

Though he'd put on a sober expression until now, Toogaito's brows were raised.

"... No. I told you not to mess with anything inside."

"We'll place the objects back where we found them when we're done, please let us search."

"I said no!"

He suddenly raised his voice.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Toogaito-sempai. It's fine, I guess that's too bad."

Chitanda replied frantically while Toogaito continued speaking loudly.

"I'm already quite busy today as I have to submit my ideas to the editorial team by tomorrow. Just what is this entering into our place to search all over for stuff? Your anthologies ain't here, so leave already!"

While Toogaito was getting increasingly agitated, I merely looked at him coldly. It seems he's sprung the trap as I had expected him to.

I gazed at Toogaito while holding a friendly smile.

"Sempai, we're interested in the contents of a chemical safe."

"... What?"

"The anthologies are supposed to be inside the chemical safe. If you said they're not here, then they surely must not be here. Since we don't want to trouble you any further."

I then stopped smiling and added, "By the way, we'll be heading to the library now. If after we leave you manage to find the anthologies, would you please be so kind as to bring them over to the Geology Room? We'll leave the door unlocked."

It seemed Toogaito was really furious at my proposal, as he twisted his previously rational face and stared at me. In contrast, I treated it as though it was nothing special. After all, I've never heard of anyone in the history of this world getting injured just by being stared at.

"W, why you, how did you..."

"Yes, Sempai?"

After restraining himself, Toogaito swallowed what he was about to say.

He then sighed deeply and reverted back to his courteous self.

"Fine, I'll do it when I find them."

"I am most grateful... Well, shall we go, Chitanda, Ibara?"

Probably not understanding the meaning behind my exchange with Toogaito, the startled girls merely agreed with me and followed me out, as there was no point in staying any longer.

"Oreki-san, what just happened?"

"I'll explain later."

After telling them so, I led them out of the Biology Room.

A voice called out to me from behind, "You, first year. I still haven't heard what your name is."

I turned and replied indifferently, "Oreki Houtarou... Sorry about that just now."

Along the corridor linking the Special Block and the General Block, I leaned against one of the walls. As we were killing time here, the two girls took this chance to ask me, "Oreki, I don't know what's going on, but aren't we heading to the library?"

I waved my hand.

"Nope, since there's no need to."

"I don't get it. If there's no need to, why aren't we going back to the club room?"

"We can't. We'll need to wait a bit longer."

Ibara muttered, "Just what is he up to" while still looking unconvinced.

Chitanda, while sniffing her nose, took over for Ibara and asked, "Oreki-san, Toogaito-sempai looked furious."

"It seems so."

"Of course it's good if the back issues are indeed found, but to make such a forceful request out of him..."

"Forceful? I merely requested him reasonably."

Chitanda opened and closed her mouth as she was at a loss for words. That is to be expected. Since all I asked was "to help look for our stuff" and "bring them over once they're found".

"But, Toogaito-sempai was furious."

"Was he that furious?"

Standing beside Chitanda, Ibara raised her brow and asked, "After Oreki made that request of him, his anger looked more like he was acting."

Oh, so she noticed.

"Is that so?"

Though apparently Chitanda still hasn't.

I took a look at my watch. Three minutes had passed... Should be about time. I stood away from the wall I was leaning on and asked, "Chitanda, how well-known are the Toogaitos?"

Chitanda tilted her head, wondering why I would ask for something like this and answered, "The Toogaitos? They're quite influential in the high school educational circles. They've got one member in the Prefectural School Board and one in the City School Board, as well as one school principal and two teachers."

Now I see.

"Oreki, what about the anthologies already?"

I replied, "I think it's time we return."

Chitanda and Ibara looked at each other upon hearing my answer. I merely smiled.

And so we arrived at the Geology Room.

"Ah, here they are."

It was as I said. On top of the teacher's desk were stacked dozens of thin notebooks. I couldn't help but pump my fist. It feels good to have something go completely according to plan.

"They came? How can that be possible?" Ibara said while walking towards the teacher's desk. As she picked up one of the notebooks, she muttered, "... It's really the anthologies..."

"Eh, eh?? Eru, let me have a look as well!"

"How did you do that, Oreki? Did you know something we didn't?"

Ibara's stern questioning made it sound as though I did something wrong. I was never good at evading questions, so I leaned on one of the tables nearby and answered, "I just did a bit of blackmailing, that's all."

"Blackmailing? Against the President of the Wall Newspaper Club?"

"Yup. But, Ibara, can you be more discreet?"

Ibara made a sullen face upon me saying that.

"It's not like I would go tell anyone."

"Yeah, but you don't sound too reliable. It's supposed to be a secret that Toogaito is doing errands for a first year student, it'll be too pitiful for him if that secret is not kept."

"I won't tell anyone... If you don't trust me, then I'm fine if you don't give me the explanation." she said brusquely. She's probably not lying. Chitanda was a completely different matter; sating her curiosity wasn't exactly a priority for her. So if she realizes that trouble may arise from me explaining, then she'd rather not hear it. She's the sort that would come up with such solutions.

Anyway, now that I've tested them, it seemed safe to assume that the girls won't go telling anyone else.

"Sorry about that. Anyway, Ibara, didn't you find it strange as to why Toogaito would have the door locked?"

Ibara replied bluntly, "He probably didn't want anybody to disturb him, as he did say he was preparing articles to publish, didn't he?"

"Then, what about the Preparation Room? Why was the fan on when the window was already open?"

"Maybe he's feeling hot?"

"Then he could have just placed the fan next to the window. Yet the fan was placed opposite it. With the fan in that position, if the pen case was moved slightly, all the B1 paper underneath would have been blown away."

Ibara rubbed her hair in irritation.

"So what about it?"

"Don't you get it? What Toogaito was intending to do?"

"If you put it that way, then I kind of get it. Was he trying to ventilate the room?"

I gently lifted my thumb and praised her. Of course, Ibara wasn't going to find that interesting and so turned her gaze away.

"Now then, the next question would be, why would he want to ventilate the room? To further elaborate, what was Toogaito, from a family of respected educators, doing alone in the club room with the door locked with infrared sensors set outside?"

"W, wait a minute! What infrared sensors? Are we in a spy novel or something?"

Ah, I forgot to explain, "Don't you ever see those gadget store commercials? They were selling those infrared sensors that would trigger the security alarm a while ago. I think you might get them for 5000 yen now."

"Where did you find them?"

"By the side of the third floor corridor just outside the Wall Newspaper Club room. They were camouflaged in white. It's hard to conclude that they're sensors just by observation alone, but the fact that there was a speaker inside the Preparation Room more or less confirmed my suspicions."

Ibara raised her brow and said, "You really are weird."

"Stop treating me as some outcast... Anyway, where were we? Ah yes, upon being informed by the sensors in advance that someone was approaching, why would he risk getting the B1 papers blown away just to ventilate the room? Any thoughts?"

Ibara began thinking at my question, and so I waited.

She then replied with an incredulous look befitting her sharp tongue, "... Could it be some odour...?"

I gently clapped my hands two to three times,

"You got it. He was trying to get rid of an odour. If we think along this line, then him using anti-odour sprays had nothing to do with any obsession with cleanliness. Now, what was the odour he was trying to get rid of? By the way, it's not any sort of narcotics."

"Then, could it be...?"

"That's right, he's probably smoking... It was a device used so that he may do so in peace. Considering that he comes from a prestigious clan, you can imagine what a scandal it would be if a son of a noble upbringing were caught doing something illegal. Since the Toogaitos are supposed to be respected high school educators. In this day and age, if you're a doctor, teacher or police officer, even just yawning in public could get you in a lot of trouble."

"... I see. If that's true, then he sure has gone to a lot of trouble doing all that."

Indeed. That's what I thought as well. Had the circumstances been different, the problem he faced would have been different as well. Thinking back, he seemed visibly shaken when he learned that Chitanda was from the Chitanda clan. He must have been thinking that if his deeds were exposed

by someone from another prestigious clan, the relationship between his and other clans would have been greatly affected. After all, we all know how sensitive Chitanda's senses are. Had Chitanda not caught a cold, no amount of ventilation or removing of his shirt would have fooled her.

"Well, I don't exactly understand his desire to smoke on the school grounds, though. Happy with the explanation now?"

Upon saying that, Ibara's gaze changed. Whoa, she's showing her true worth with such a cold stare.

"You know, I was merely trying to ask how Toogaito-sempai had brought the anthologies over. While I get how you blackmailed him with his dirty secret in order to get him to bring them over, you still haven't explained where they were in the first place."

I see, I must have missed that part. So I explained, "They must be in the chemical safe."

"O-re-ki!"

"I, I'm not trying to ridicule you! The problem here is where the chemical safe was... Remember Toogaito mentioned something about moving cardboard boxes in when the rooms changed? He had no reason to lie about this, so I figured that the chemical safe was somewhere in the club room."

"... But I didn't see it."

"It doesn't mean it's not there. You couldn't see it because it was hidden... I'm talking about the safe itself, not just the anthologies."

I let Ibara digest what I meant by that as I continued, "As a result, the anthologies were also hidden along with it. As for why he hid the safe away, that's because he was using it to store his cigarettes. Notice we didn't see any cigarettes, lighters or ash trays? That's because he hid them all inside the safe. Did you notice his expression when I suggested to ask Ooide-sensei to search the room with us? Anyway, as for where the safe was hidden, I'd guess that it was probably under that makeshift cardboard box table."

I took a deep sigh upon finishing my explanation.

I did something bad to Toogaito by putting him in a position where he had to comply with my request. Though I had no intention of exposing his secret, as we all have secrets to keep, and I wouldn't like it if mine were exposed either. Let's just say he was unlucky.

Ibara, whom I've been speaking to all this time, took a sidelong glance. Following it, I noticed the presence of a person who ought to have been more talkative about this. I turned to face her.

"Chitanda?"

Chitanda was looking at the anthologies on the teacher's desk. Though she was only looking and had not opened any of them. Her serious gaze was the same as those I saw in the Cafe Pineapple Sandwich. It was as though she didn't even hear me call out to her.

"What's wrong, Chitanda?"

As she didn't hear me, I got up from the table I was leaning on and walked up to tap her shoulder.

"Is something the matter?"

"Oh, Oreki-san... Have a look at this."

She handed one of the anthologies over to me.

It was a thin notebook, with the same dimensions as those Campus Notebooks seen in stationary stores^[2]. The books were stitched together elegantly. They must have relied on someone professional to help them publish these. The cover was made of brown leather; on top was an ink painting of a dog and a hare drawn in a deformed cartoonish style.

A number of hares formed an outer ring, and within the centre were a dog and a hare biting each other. The dog's canine teeth were sunken into the hare's torso as though ripping it apart, while the hare's incisor teeth were nibbling deeply at the dog's neck. As it was drawn in a deformed way, it looked hilarious instead of grotesque. Though it also felt ominous. There was an old saying in the past about the hunting dogs getting cooked alongside the hares that they just hunted^[3]. But now the dog and hare were instead hunting each other. Two of the hares in the ring looked on at such a seemingly cute scene.

On top of the illustration were some words, printed in proper fonts that read "Hyouka^[4] Volume 2". The publication date was 1968... That's quite old, and the name...

"Hyouka...?"

Is that the title?

"Such a strange title."

Ibara peeked across my shoulder, and agreed with me, "Yeah, and a hard to understand one as well."

We felt the same way as I felt hearing the name Kanya Festival for the first time, although guessing the origin for the name Kanya Festival was more straightforward. If the writers of this anthology had to decide upon a name, they would most likely choose one that's strongly connected to its contents. But I can see no connection between "Classics Club Essay Anthology" and the name "Hyouka".

Pointing at the illustration at the cover, I asked Ibara, "As someone from the Manga Studies Club, what do you think of this cover?"

"I think it's drawn superbly. The illustration design has brilliantly discarded all sense of perspective regarding distance... Hmm, this is good. I like this."

I was a bit surprised, as it's not normally possible for Ibara to clearly say whether she likes or dislikes something. Besides, this illustration has managed to leave an impression on her. As though regretting she just said she liked this, Ibara returned the book to me and began her justification,

"Er, 'like' is not exactly right. Since the art is not that beautiful... it looks threatening as well, after all. And I wasn't talking from an artistic point of view, but from a media perspective..."

Meanwhile, Chitanda didn't seem like she would tremble from joy at finally obtaining the long sought after back issues. Rather, it looked as though her expression had been sucked out by a vampire.

I asked her once again, "Chitanda, is something the matter?"

Upon hearing me, she dragged me to the corner of the classroom and said, "This."

"What?"

Rather than her eyes glittering in curiosity, the neat expression of our elegant lady that was drenched in the orange sunset looked more like she was discovering a secret as she whispered, "I found this. This is what my uncle wanted to show me. If I have this, then I should be able to find out what it was that my uncle said to me."

I see.

"So do you remember anything?"

In place of an answer, she pointed to the "Hyouka Volume 2" I was holding.

"This mentioned something about my uncle. Something seemed to have happened with the Classics Club 33 years ago... Have a look inside."

I did as she told me and opened the cover, and before me was written a foreword.

Foreword

And so we have a Cultural Festival again this year.

It has been one year since Sekitani-sempai left us.

During this year, Sempai has fallen into legend and become a hero. As a result, the five day Cultural Festival will commence as usual.

However, as the legend spread, I went into deep thought. Would people ten years from now still remember the silent warrior and the kind hero? All Sempai has left behind is this anthology "Hyouka", for which he has provided the title.

As a sacrifice of the conflict, even Sempai's smile would end up along the flow of time into eternity.

No, perhaps it is better that we do not remember it. As it was not intended to be a heroic tale.

Once the subjectivity is taken away, this story will become a classic as it transcends all historical perspectives.

Will the day come when our stories become a classic for someone in the future?

October 13th, 1968 Kooriyama Youko

"This is..."

"The 'last year' referred to here meant 33 years ago today. In that case, the 'Sekitani-sempai' of the Classics Club must be my uncle. What happened to my uncle back then? The answer that my uncle told me had something to do with the Classics Club then..."

I smiled, and I did not wonder why Chitanda wasn't smiling as well as I said, "Isn't this fine? You should be able to remember now."

Yet Chitanda's expressionless face gave way to one of gloominess as she struggled to get the words out softly,

"But, I just can't. Even though I was this close! I, am I really that bad at remembering things? What was it my uncle said to me? What happened to him 33 years ago?"

I could not tell whether her muffled voice came from her cold or her tears.
Chitanda...

I decided to speak, "Let's investigate it."

I didn't think I spoke coldly.

The anthology "Hyouka Volume 2" that I took back from Chitanda was written 32 years ago. On it was the strange name "Hyouka" which was given by Sekitani Jun, as well as the mentioning of a forgotten incident.

This was a great chance. For these clues were like lights that shone for us who were groping in the dark. In order for Chitanda to regain her past, I firmly believe we must not discard such clues.

That's why I said again, "Then we'll just need to investigate what happened 33 years ago."

"But,"

Chitanda drooped her shoulders.

"But it said they'd rather not remember it."

I was surprised at her timidity for such things.

"But you want to remember it, right?"

"Of course, but if we investigate further,"

She paused before continuing, "... If we investigate further, we might end up finding something unpleasant. There are things that are better forgotten, aren't there?"

"..."

That's because you're too kind, Chitanda.

"Even if it's happened 33 years ago?"

"Is that wrong?"

I shook my head.

"Yeah. After all, didn't it say here as well? 'Once the subjectiveness is taken away, this story will become a classic as it transcends all historical perspectives.'"

"..."

"In other words, there's an expiration date for that."

I made a smile. Though Chitanda didn't smile as well, she nodded gently.

"... OK."

And so.

Yes, and so, I chuckled within my heart as I remained smiling. Investigating shouldn't take up much effort. If the second volume mentions something about "last year", all we had to do was look in the first volume to find out what happened to Sekitani Jun. It should be finished in no time. Though I wouldn't say which was the easier option: the avoidance of the problem or the solving of the problem.

... I was naive to think like that. As Ibara was quietly fishing through the remaining volumes, she said indignantly,

"What the? There's no volume 1!"

In order to digest what I had just heard, it seemed I needed some time.

6 - The Old Days of the Glorious Classics Club

It was the end of July and Summer Vacation had begun. Today I was riding my bike along the road towards Kami High as usual. It would take 20 minutes to get there from my place by foot, though I have no idea how long it'll take by bike. I stopped to buy a can of black coffee from a vending machine while resting. I then followed the riverside and turned at the hospital before arriving in front of Kami High. And there I stood with an amazed look.

Summer Vacation was supposed to have started already.

Yet the sports ground was filled with prop equipment and students in their summer uniforms. I could hear music played by various wind instruments, electric guitars and bamboo flutes. Even though the Special Block was some distance from here, I could tell there were many students there as well. They were of course all here to prepare for the Kanya Festival. The energetic side of Kami High has only gotten more active now that Summer Vacation has started. Crowds of people were crawling around like a group of ants as though saying "Alright guys, the festival is coming up soon! Now that annoying classes are out of the way, let's give it our best!"

I gazed at these people overflowing with energy while noticing a person trotting towards me. It was Fukube Satoshi, dressed casually in short sleeved shirt and shorts, while carrying a sporty-looking mini-rucksack over his back.

"Hey,"

"Sorry, man. Kept you waiting?"

I was happily listening to the A Capella Club practicing their singing in the central courtyard, and Satoshi had to make me turn around with such a creepy voice. I contemplated turning my bike around and going home, but then I changed my mind and proceeded to walk towards him and acted as if I was about to kick him.

"Whoa, Houtarou! What's with the sudden ferocity?"

"You sure are one to talk! Have you no shame in not knowing when not to disturb the peace?"

Satoshi shrugged his shoulders.

It doesn't seem like he has any.

"Sorry man, the Handicraft Club meeting went into overtime."

"Just what on earth were you discussing anyway?"

"We're going to knit a Buddhist-like Mandala carpet for the Kanya Festival. But we've run into a few problems, so we had a contingency meeting just now."

Well, tough work you had there. Not just you, but Toogaito, or even the whole school for that matter.

"So, you got your notes ready?"

As I ask dryly, Satoshi merely bounced back the question to me.

"What about you? It's not something you're used to doing. You thought of something yet?"

I felt a bit embarrassed at having to answer that, so I said, "Well, sort of."

"Oh? Now that's rare. Normally you would try to find an excuse and deny such questions... Anyway, I'll go get my bike, so hang on a bit longer."

And so Satoshi insolently left me waiting while he trotted towards the bicycle parking lot.

As to why I was waiting for Satoshi out here when I ought to be sleeping like there's no tomorrow during such a precious Summer Vacation, we'll need to go back to a week ago, the day when we were so close to finding out the truth about Sekitani Jun, which should be written in the first volume of the club anthology "Hyouka", only to find out that that specific volume was missing. As we couldn't get anywhere without that first volume, I thought to myself that I was not going to go all out to pursue the answer. But it was already too late, for I had crossed the Rubicon without even realizing.

I knew it was pointless to dissuade Chitanda from this, so I proposed a compromise solution. If we're going to investigate the past, just the two of us was not going to be enough. After all, "Three's a crowd" as the saying goes. It may be a bit hard for her, but I told her that we had a better chance of solving this with Satoshi and Ibara's help.

Thereupon Chitanda nodded in agreement.

"I guess we have no choice then."

Even though she requested to keep it between ourselves during our discussion in the Cafe Pineapple Sandwich, I ended up letting her down. I

could not tell if it was because Chitanda realized deeply that she would need all the support she could get, or because she no longer regarded the clue that appeared before as important anymore, or it could be possible that our lady here was simply whimsical; at any rate, she had called for an emergency meeting with the Classics Club the following day.

There, Chitanda repeated what she told me before and concluded, "I'm *very* curious as to what happened to my uncle 33 years ago."

Ibara accepted the challenge right away.

"The cover illustration interests me. If we can solve this and find out the story behind that, I could even use it as publishing material for the Manga Studies Club."

Satoshi followed, "The Fictional Heroic Tale to be solved by their juniors 33 years later, huh? I just happened to be researching into stuff from that period."

And approved with both hands raised. While I had no intention of speaking since I had no power of veto, I decided to say something anyway since we were at it.

"Since we're still deciding on what to write for our essay anthology, why don't we use Chitanda's story to help fill up the pages... um, I mean, killing two birds with one stone... sorry, I mean, write something meaningful for it?"

My energy-saving proposal, though quite forward-looking, was accepted unanimously. And so investigating the incident of the Kamiyama High School Classics Club 33 years ago became the Classics Club's priority.

Satoshi rode a mountain bike. As he was wearing shorts, sturdy muscles could be seen on his legs that didn't match his short stature. For a polyglot like him, the only sport that I knew he was interested in was cycling.

By the way, my bike was what you'd call a family wagon^[1], so there's not much to elaborate upon.

We rode along the river and away from the main street. Slowly the distance between houses was replaced by huge rice paddies. Stopping under the shade of some tobacco store to hide from the sun, I took a towel out of my bag to wipe off the sweat that's been constantly dripping out.

Ahh, such a good sweat.

Was not something I would ever say. Rather, I wonder why people have to move in order to get to their destination. "The information revolution has not yet succeeded. Comrades, you must carry on!" [2]

"Satoshi, are we there yet?"

Satoshi placed his handkerchief back in his pocket and replied, "Yup. We're pretty much there. According to your speed, of course."

He then smiled.

"You'll be surprised when you see their mansion. The Chitandas are one of the biggest farm owners in Kamiyama City."

Guess I'll be looking forward to it. I'd sure like to hear how they do their spring cleaning in such a big place. After wiping more sweat with my towel, I put my foot on the saddle and rode on.

Once we restarted, Satoshi took the lead and guided us. After crossing numerous traffic signals, we then came to a long straight road, where we rode parallel to each other. For some distance now there was nothing but farmland on both sides of the road.

As Satoshi spun his pedal, he began to hum joyfully. Smiling was his default expression, though he seemed particularly delighted today. I decided to ask him, "Satoshi,"

"Yeah?"

"Are you happy?"

Satoshi turned towards me and replied cheerfully, "Sure I am. Since I like cycling. Look at the blue skies! And the white clouds! No matter how dull they look, the joy of looking at them while riding at full speed is like..."

I quickly interrupted Satoshi's attempt at joking.

"I thought your high school life was average at best."

Suddenly looking sullen, Satoshi replied, "Oh... you mean the rose-coloured thing."

Great memory you have there, especially when we last spoke about it nearly three months ago. Satoshi slowed down somewhat and faced forward while saying, "You know, basically I think my high school life is pretty rose-coloured."

"No, it's more like shocking pink."

"Haha, that's good as well. If that's the case, then yours is grey."

"You already told me that."

As my voice was hardly raised, Satoshi didn't go whistling in glee.

"Did I? Don't take it the wrong way, I didn't mean it as an insult when I said the colour of your high school life is grey."

"..."

"For example, if my life is shocking pink, then no one can paint it rose. I won't let them."

I ridiculed his smiling face at once.

"Really? I thought it's already been painted."

"Of course it hasn't!"

Satoshi said with a surprisingly firm response and continued, "It hasn't, Houtarou. I'm already busy with the Student Council General Committee as well as the Handicraft Club, you think I'd say that? You gotta be kidding me. Whether it's helping to organize the timetable for the Kanya Festival, or knitting the Mandala carpet, I have enjoyed every moment of it. Otherwise, who would want to sacrifice a joyous bicycle ride during Sundays or Summer Vacation just to go to school anyway?"

"They won't?"

"There exist occasions where one has to lend their skill and presence for the sake of the greater society. But even so, you're not the sort who would budge an inch, right? For a grey-coloured person like you, if a flag-bearer declares that 'everyone is rose-coloured', you would wave your hand and say 'count me out.'"

After saying all that in one breath, he calmed down a bit and went on, "If I really wanted to offend you, I would have called you colourless."

Satoshi went silent after saying that. I ruminated at his response while getting my skin burned by the sun.

"..."

And made a sullen face.

"I'm not going to say I wanna like you or something like that, you know."

"Nah, that's not what I meant."

Satoshi raised his voice and laughed. He then said, "Look, Houtarou, we've reached the Chitanda residence!"

As befitting of its description, the Chitanda "mansion" was built in the middle of a vast paddy field. It was built in a Japanese-styled bungalow surrounded by hedges. The sound of water flowing suggested the presence of a pond in the garden, which was surrounded by well-trimmed pine trees. And in front of the large opened gate, there were people sprinkling water ritually.^[3]

"How about that? Pretty impressive, isn't it?"

Satoshi said while puffing out his chest, even though I was no expert in Japanese architecture or Japanese gardening. While I had no idea how impressive this estate was, I did feel that it had an elegant and dignified feel to it.

As we were marveling at the estate, I had a look at my watch. We were just about on time... No, seems like we're a little bit late.

"Let's go, the girls are waiting for us."

"Ah, yes... By the way, Houtarou,"

"What now?"

"Aren't we supposed to wait for some servants to come out and greet us?"

I decided to ignore him. I stepped up to the front porch and rang the doorbell.

"... Coming~"

After waiting for a while, the door was opened by none other than Chitanda herself. Her summer cold seemed to have healed as she was now speaking in her usual voice once again. She let her long hair flow down her shoulders without tying it, and was dressed in a fitting bright green one-piece dress.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

I could hear Satoshi click his tongue, as though disappointed that there was no servant out to greet us.

After taking off our shoes at the concrete entrance, Chitanda led us through a wooden corridor.

"Where did you park your bicycles?"

"Where can we park them?"

"Anywhere is fine."

Then why did you ask?

Before long, we were led to a pair of paper sliding doors, and a cool breeze escaped upon opening them. As the ceiling was high, the room felt refreshingly cool. The room size was about... 15 square metres. That's huge.

"You're late."

Ibara had already arrived. It seemed like she had some business at school beforehand, as she was dressed in her school uniform. There was a dark brown table which gave a dull light reflection, and on top of it were many pieces of paper. Must be Ibara's notes. She's quite fired up for this.

"Please sit anywhere you like."

I sat opposite Ibara upon being prompted. As Chitanda took the host seat, the remaining seat was taken by Satoshi. It was rare to have someone carrying a rucksack sitting in a traditional Japanese-styled reception alcove.^[4] Opening the rucksack, Satoshi took out numerous pieces of paper from it. I too opened my shoulder bag and took out my own notes. Ibara looked very ready as she toyed with her pen, while Chitanda stacked a pile of paper on the table.

"Now then..."

Chitanda spoke,

"Let us begin our investigative meeting."

We all bowed and took our greetings.

Naturally, the meeting was chaired by Chitanda, as she was the club president, after all.

"Let us confirm the agenda for today's meeting. It all started with a reminiscence of mine. Then, when we discovered the essay anthology 'Hyouka', I realized whatever happened with the Classics Club 33 years ago had something to do with this reminiscence. The purpose of this meeting is to speculate as to what happened 33 years ago. Furthermore, any facts that have been confirmed will be used as essay materials for this year's Classics Club essay anthology."

Though Ibara was mainly interested in the design of the cover illustration, she did not seem too dissatisfied with Chitanda's proclamation. Perhaps she realized it had something to do with the incident itself, or Chitanda had briefed her about it?

"During this past week, we have gone about collecting all kinds of material for research, and subsequently we shall report on our findings and speculate on the incident 33 years ago. We will then assemble our findings and deduce the most likely conclusion possible."

Huh? Was that what this meeting was about? Last I heard, Chitanda only told us to bring any material we could find. I didn't remember anything about deducing a conclusion... But since Satoshi and Ibara did not look the least bit surprised, then this must mean I wasn't paying attention. Damn, guess I'll have to get it over with somehow, but my stomach still felt queasy.

Without carrying any sort of agenda sheet with her, Chitanda looked at every one of us and smoothly explained, "We shall take turns reporting our findings, followed by questions from other members, establishing a hypothesis, and reviewing said hypothesis. Asking questions during reporting is forbidden... This is to prevent our words from getting jumbled, you see. Now then, let's hear the first report."

Hey, she's actually quite a good chairperson. Who knows, she may have the talent for these kinds of things.

No, she did tell me that she's the sort that would seek to understand the entire system, so it's not surprising to see her so well-versed in the rules of chairing meetings.

"Can we have the first report... huh?"

"Chi-chan, who's doing the first report anyway?"

"Umm, who should it be?"

... And then she says something strange like that. I do wonder whether she's easy to read or whether her organization is limited to her actions only. I spoke out to a flustered Chitanda.

"Anyone's fine. Why don't you start?"

Since it's usually the chairperson that starts doing the talking, no? It's not like Chitanda wasn't going to report anything. And since she did lay out the format for this reporting style, she may as well start first and get things rolling smoothly. She nodded and said, "Oh, you're right. Alright then, now... we shall report one by one in clockwise direction starting with me."

She began distributing her notes in the tray upon saying that.

A simple glance told me that this was the source of this investigation, the foreword of "Hyouka Volume 2". I see, so she's starting from the beginning, huh? Though I won't say this was her usual style. I once again read the paragraph that I saw before.

Foreword

And so we have a Cultural Festival again this year.

It has been one year since Sekitani-sempai left us.

During this year, Sempai has fallen into legend and become a hero. As a result, the five day Cultural Festival will commence as usual.

However, as the legend spread, I went into deep thought. Would people ten years from now still remember the silent warrior and the kind hero? All Sempai has left behind is this anthology "Hyouka", for which he has provided the title.

As a sacrifice of the conflict, even Sempai's smile would end up along the flow of time into eternity.

No, perhaps it is better that we do not remember it. As it was not intended to be a heroic tale.

Once the subjectivity is taken away, this story will become a classic as it transcends all historical perspectives.

Will the day come when our stories become a classic for someone in the future?

October 13th, 1968 Kooriyama Youko

After clearing her throat, Chitanda began explaining, "This is taken from the essay anthology 'Hyouka'. In order to determine what sort of articles 'Hyouka' publishes yearly, one would have to read its foreword and find out what sort of topics it covered. Unfortunately, having said that, this paragraph was the only text that makes any mention of the incident 33 years ago. It may be that it's written in other places, but we do not have the first volume... Anyway, I have summarized the main points of this foreword in these notes here,"

She then distributed copies for the second page.

1. "Sempai" had departed. (From where?)
2. "Sempai" became a hero 33 years ago, and had become a legend by the following year
3. "Sempai" was a "silent warrior" and "kind hero"
4. "Sempai" named this anthology "Hyouka"
5. A conflict happened and sacrifices were made ("Sempai" = sacrifice?)

"Wow."

Now that sure was brief and straight to the point. I couldn't help but sigh in wonder, but thinking about it, while Chitanda was the manifestation of Curiosity itself, she was also an honours student. If she did not know how to summarize things, she would not be able to get such high grades.

After making sure everyone had read through the note, Chitanda continued with her explanation.

"First of all, this 'Sempai', in other words my uncle, had dropped out of Kamiyama High School. His final academic level was Junior High. I hope you're all following me."

While this was the first time I heard Chitanda mention Sekitani Jun had dropped out of Kamiyama High School, I wasn't particularly surprised. After all, it was not hard to guess from the opening sentence of the foreword: "since Sekitani-sempai left us".

But then, Chitanda probably doesn't know the reason why her uncle dropped out... No, she definitely doesn't know. If she did, she would have mentioned it already. Come to think of it, back at the Cafe Pineapple Sandwich, she did mention that the Sekitanis and Chitandas have become estranged.

"Second, the foreword makes a big issue out of how time has passed. The third point is interesting; besides mentioning 'Sempai' as kind and silent, he's also described as a 'warrior' and 'hero'. What was he fighting for? The fifth point merely affirms that 'Sempai' fought in some conflict and became a hero, and was sacrificed as a result. As for the fourth point... while I'm curious about it, it's irrelevant to the current problem for now. This concludes my report, are there any questions?"

As it wasn't particularly offbeat, I didn't have much to ask.

While it would have been usual for our eccentric (i.e. Satoshi) to raise his hand during classes, in gatherings like these where there are few people and everyone knows each other, he saw no reason to do so. So instead, it was Ibara who started asking right away, "Umm, why was this line 'As it was not intended to be a heroic tale' not considered at all?"

Satoshi knew the answer of course. Though he wanted to speak, he held back his words and looked at me. He can be quite polite when the situation calls for it, not wanting to interrupt Chitanda as she answers.

On the other hand, as Chitanda was the one being asked, she replied right away, "That phrase was just a mental image, as different people may have different views as to what a heroic tale means."

"Besides,"

Upon waiting for Chitanda finished her explanation, Satoshi added right away, "It probably means that it was nothing as romantic as a heroic tale, but more of a dirty battle. So I think it's not just a mental image."

Somehow Ibara was convinced.

There were no other questions asked.

"Now, I will begin my hypothesis."

Chitanda sounded neither confident nor uncertain, but was just being her usual self. She did not hold any memos of the sort as she began, "My uncle seemed to have been involved in some conflict, and after that, he dropped out of school. I'm not entirely sure, but I think the conflict was what led to him dropping out. There is one more point to consider besides the five points I mentioned: the opening sentence 'It has been one year since'.

"In other words, my uncle dropped out one year before the Kanya Festival, meaning during the previous Kanya Festival. By the way, I heard from a friend of mine who goes to Kamiyama Commercial High School that there was an incident in their Cultural Festival last year."

Satoshi said cheerfully, "The Rampage of the Cultural Festival, I think it was called. Stalls were threatened while sale proceedings disappeared."

Chitanda nodded.

"There's a saying that as long as there's a system, there would exist entities that would go against it. Whether it's the Cultural Festival, Sports Festival or the Graduation Ceremony, there would occasionally be people opposed to these so-called annual events. One more thing, please have a look at page 24 of the Kami High Student Handbook."

Despite her saying that, no one could take out their Student Handbook. This was a matter of fact, as who would actually bring such a thing with them all the time?

"... Is something wrong?"

"Unfortunately we left our handbooks at home. So what was written in there?"

"... Could it be that you don't carry the handbook with you at all times? Oh, never mind. Umm, here's what it says, 'Violent behaviour is strictly forbidden'. So here is my theory,"

Without changing the tone of her voice, Chitanda went on, "There was an unfortunate disturbance during the Kanya Festival that year, and it could be that my uncle responded to it with physical force. While he may have become a hero, he had to carry the responsibility of resorting to violence. The subsequent tragic outcome resulted in his underclassmen writing a eulogy for his departure."

... Hmm...

Satoshi and I both spoke simultaneously.

"Nope, rejected."

"Sorry, Chitanda."

Ibara then turned, not to Chitanda but to us, wondering just what on earth we were thinking.

"Is the theory wrong? Can you please tell me your reason why?"

Chitanda spoke quietly and looked at me with a serious expression. I merely shrugged my shoulders and replied, "You said there exist people who go against the system and cause a rampage in the Cultural Festival. But this would have required the stalls to have quite high sales proceeds in order to attract anyone to even steal from them. Besides, do you remember what I said when you suggested we publish an essay anthology?"

Chitanda spun her eyes around slowly.

"You said it's too labour intensive."

"No, not that. Something else."

"Something else? Umm... You also said three authors is a bit too much, but we now have four."

... Should I be complimenting her on her amazing memory? As if I would. I recognize her ability to remember this stuff, but Chitanda, technically speaking, when I said that there were still only three members.

"What else?"

"... You mentioned alternatives to publishing things, like,"

At last she's getting to the point. She placed her palms together before her chest and recalled, "Setting up an exhibition booth, and then I said,"

"You said exhibition booths are traditionally forbidden. I remember that as well. If that's the case, then there'd be no place for any money to be made in the Kanya Festival. You think people could find something valuable to steal at such an event?"

As though not convinced with such an argument, Chitanda tilted her head intimately and said, "But there is a possibility."

"What is it?"

"While it may have no monetary value, I believe such there is value in other areas."

Ugh.

... Well, she does have a point. If she puts it that way, there's nothing I can say.

Satoshi laughed.

"You're so hopeless, Houtarou. You can't convince Chitanda-san like that."

"Really? Then what have you come up with?"

"Something I know won't get rebutted at least."

Satoshi then pretended to clear his throat and began, "'For every system there exists a group of people who opposes it'; that's an interesting way of putting it, Chitanda-san. It is most probably true. Yet the form of resistance is dependent on the fashion of the times as well.

"While it's true that there are occasions where incidents have occurred during Cultural Festivals, most of the time the perpetrators were acting for the purpose of materialistic gain. But that is not to say that there are no disturbances in which the motive is not materialistic. You have to remember this was 33 years ago, so to suggest material gain as a motive for the disturbance was well-nigh impossible."

Fashion of the times? As in style of resistance?

What's he trying to say? I could sense something up his sleeve. So too did Ibara and Chitanda, who looked at Satoshi in puzzlement.

"... Why's that?"

Ibara prompted Satoshi to continue as he was assuming an air of importance while saying nothing. He nodded satisfyingly and said, "You probably won't get it if I say 33 years ago, but what if I use the term '1960s'?"

Satoshi looked pretty triumphant. Normally I wouldn't go about wasting so much energy just to compete with him in acquiring such knowledge, but it just feels depressing to see him in such a good mood as he boasts about it. Unfortunately, I was not familiar with history.

"How about it, Mayaka? You have any idea now?"

Ibara probably doesn't have a clue either. She made a pose of giving up while gripping her fists together.

"Sorry Fuku-chan, I can't think of anything."

"Really? How about the National Diet Building in Tokyo? ... Still want more hints? Does placards and demonstration strike any keys? ... I'm talking about the student movement here."

"Huh?"

We looked on in bewilderment.

While I was thinking what kind of joke was he pulling, Satoshi didn't seem the least bit depressed. So I quipped in, "Satoshi, why are we suddenly having a lecture on Modern Japanese History? If you want to have a quiz show with us we can do it after we deal with this problem."

Yet Satoshi maintained a serious expression and said, "Well, I *am* dealing with the problem. Listen up, according to Chitanda-san's theory, the sort of campus violence she mentioned was quite commonplace during the 1960s. It was a time where conflicts were in abundance for pro-establishment or anti-establishment movements, so someone may have used that as an outlet and mimicked their actions. This was not a mere boom."

"... Don't say it as though you've seen it yourself."

"Like I said, I've been researching this period for some time now."

Satoshi gave me his usual invincible-looking smile.

Hmm, even without Satoshi's brief Modern History lesson, I more or less figured it out. It was not out of place for some sort of incident to occur during the Cultural Festival 33 years ago. Though I have no way of finding

out whether it's true without some sort of investigative ability (not that I care), but leaving Satoshi's jokes aside, such a theory was not impossible.

"Hmm, I see... It's true that I haven't taken into consideration contemporary events..."

Chitanda seemed to have been shaken by Satoshi's attacks on her weak points. Her theory now stood like a candle in the wind as a result.

That said, Ibara spoke up enthusiastically in support of Chitanda, "Excuse me, Chi-chan,"

"... What seems to be the matter?"

"I'm afraid Chi-chan's theory won't stand once I report what I find. I'm next, so if possible I'll continue where you left off..."

To be honest, I was a bit pissed. Why you Ibara, why'd you have to speak up unnecessarily? Yet Chitanda smiled sweetly and said, "No, my theory was found to be unsuitable after review, after all."

A respectable attitude.

"Anyway, I shall withdraw my hypothesis for now. Let us now hear from Ibara-san, is that fine with everyone here?"

No one spoke against that. It was wise to have Chitanda as our top batter. As Chitanda discarded her own theory, it was now Ibara's turn to insist that such a theory was correct. Being a prudent person, Ibara would probably speak in an easy to understand manner.

"Well then, please start, Ibara-san."

The copies that Ibara handed out to us, how should I say this, they were written in a completely different style that was easy to comprehend. The fonts and typography looked smug, while the words were hard to read with their lack of curves. On the B5 paper were written the following lines:

In other words, we, the Masses, are able to carry on with our independent and Anti-Bureaucratic activities without obstruction. Though this was by no means a succumb to violence.

Despite the Great Strife that occurred last June, thanks to the Classics Club president Sekitani Jun's heroic support of our bold pragmatism, the sight of

Powers That Be making a fool out of themselves as their calculations backfired remained fresh in our memories.

"This was one of the Manga Studies Club's old anthologies. It's titled 'Unity and Salutations Volume 1', though they've only published 2 volumes in total. Like Chi-chan's book, this was also published 32 years ago. I was thinking that if 'Hyouka' made a mention of this incident, then I could find something by doing a search in the library. As expected, there aren't many clubs that lasted for more than 30-40 years. At first I thought the Manga Studies Club couldn't possibly have existed back then, yet I just happened to stumble upon this... Amazing, isn't it?"

I had no idea whether she meant the discovery of this anthology was amazing or that the anthology itself was amazing. Unity and Salutations... was that the kind of titles they used back then? It somehow sounded suspicious. And the style of prose that they used back then! This sounded more like what the Classics Club would be using instead.

On the other hand, it was clear why Chitanda's theory was overturned. Simply put, the Kamiyama High School Cultural Festival is held every October, yet this passage mentions the incident happening in June. I see, so that's why the theory's rejected.

Ibara took out a college-style memo notebook from her uniform pocket and continued, "Sorry, I haven't written any summaries the way Chi-chan did, so I'll just say them out loud. Firstly, 'we, the Masses' has been accused of being anti-establishment. There was a 'streef' that happened in June the previous year. They were assisted by Sekitani Jun, and resorted to some sort of pragmatism thanks to that. This caused troubles for the Powers That Be. The rest of the passage may be interesting, but they don't seem to have anything else relevant about the incident."

I had no objection to her speech, but what on earth is a 'streef' anyway? I browsed through my own vocabulary in my head and could find nothing. Not that my vocabulary was particularly huge to begin with.

As I was busy wondering what 'streef' meant, Chitanda continued with the meeting, "Is that all for your report?"

"Yes."

"Now then, any questions?"

I instantly asked right away, "What does 'streef' mean?"

Satoshi then asked me soon after that, "What's a 'streef' anyway?"

Why you, I thought you were supposed to know. He then took the copy of my "Unity and Salutations" and pointed the word out to me.

"She meant this, 'strife'."

So he does know what it means. Without looking at the copy I held, he continued without delay, "That should be read as 'sTRYfe', as in armed strife, a bitter conflict."

Yet Satoshi didn't seem to have taught me anything. While he was looking at me, he sounded more like he was harshly criticizing me for mispronouncing that word, yet I realized he was using me as a foil to correct Ibara as well. Whether he was skillful or not in doing it, Satoshi can be quite considerate. Though I had no intention to help out, I still persisted, "Well, though I only have 15 years worth of vocabulary, I haven't seen such a word used before."

"Of course. Normally the words 'conflict' and 'argument' would have been used, yet 'strife' seemed to be a popular word back then. We still see such words being used nowadays, but mostly by Yakuza's."

I see, now that he mentions it... words like "going" to represent "getting someone whacked". Its use sounds old and elegant, yet not quite. ^[5]

Satoshi then cleared his throat loudly and added, "... But this anthology, it feels more like an imitation."

Ibara reacted at once with riled voice, "What do you mean, 'imitation'?"

Upon being questioned like that, Satoshi moaned quietly. He was normally confident with his bluffs, yet it was rare to see him look so troubled like that as he replied meekly, "No, I'm not saying your material is fake,"

"Of course it isn't! Umm, how should I put this? Basically speaking, the author of this passage didn't take part in any action whatsoever. He's the sort that would see some spectacular college sports game and would write about how impressed he was about it, and that was how this was written. But it's not a fake, it's..."

I asked, "So, what was that about?"

"Ah, nothing, just my imagination. Sorry about that Chitanda-san, may we continue?"

The chairperson nodded and everyone agreed.

"Now then, are there any other questions?"

It seemed no one had anything else to ask. As she was about to announce her theory, Ibara looked slightly nervous as she frantically searched through her notes.

"Umm, right, here's my hypothesis. Though this would reject Chi-chan's theory, you will all understand when you first hear this."

We all remained silent in agreement. Since June and October were just way too far apart.

"Anyway, the author mentioned how the Pragmatists caused the plans of the Powers That Be to backfire. The result was the Classics Club President dropping out as mentioned in 'Hyouka'.

"Now, what was this pragmatic action that was done that warranted his dropping out? ... My view is the same as Chi-chan here, in other words, violence. If this was recent, then it might have involved something like the breaking of glass, but Fuku-chan would probably have something to say about that. The victims would be... the Powers That Be. As for the anti-establishment, well that's something that I hear often that's opposed to the government, so something like that. The rest is simple, the Classics Club president led them and confronted the teachers, and then..."

She held her fists tightly and mimicked a punch.

"*Pow* Whacked them hard. Though we don't know whether they were assaulted or not, they probably did something similar. Of course, it's not like they wanted to do this. The first paragraph which I highlighted is important, basically what it wants to emphasize is their independence. For some reason 33 years ago, that independence was threatened, and in order to defend it, the Classics Club president had no choice but to counter with resistance."

Ibara finished by closing her notebook and looked at everyone present.

"Hmm... This sounds frustrating."

The chairperson, who was supposed to digest what she just heard, spoke her thoughts out loud. I nodded and agreed.

"Frustrating? What is?"

Chitanda answered, "Ibara-san, your main point revolves around how the teachers had threatened the students' way of life, and led them to resort to violence to resist such a threat, right?"

Ibara thought for a while before replying, "Yeah, that's right."

"However, how should I put it, while I understand some parts, overall I don't quite understand."

While I understand some of what you say, overall I don't quite understand what you've just said either. Still, it was not entirely incomprehensible. She basically meant Ibara's theory wasn't very persuasive. I added to Chitanda's response, "Your theory is way too abstract. Besides, any further and you would simply be scanning the passage."

"You're right. It is indeed like that, but..."

Though she admitted as much, Ibara didn't completely retreat.

"Wait, you mean there's a contradiction?"

It seemed she wanted to defend her theory more than Chitanda did.

Unfortunately, I did notice a contradiction.

"Yup."

I said with an upright sitting posture. It had nothing to do with the tense atmosphere of rebutting other people, it's just that my feet were getting numb, that's all.

"To put it simply, you yourself have rejected Chitanda's theory that instead of the Cultural Festival in October, the incident happened in June. However, if we're to believe both 'Hyouka' and the 'Unity and Salutations', then the incident would have happened in June, while the dropping out would have occurred during the Cultural Festival in October. But Chitanda's theory makes no mention of that. And don't you find it strange that one would wait four months after getting involved in violent behaviour to drop out?"

It would be a different story if his case was pending appeal during this time, I added in my mind.

"But, that is," Ibara rebutted, even though she seemed to have understood.

"It could be that 'Hyouka' got it wrong. The 'Unity and Salutations' clearly mentions the month of June, whereas 'Hyouka' merely says 'It has been one year since'. The incident happened in June, followed by the dropping out in the same month, while the Cultural Festival is in October. It doesn't sound too unreasonable, does it?"

A four month gap, huh? This does sound like one of Ibara's far-fetched arguments...

As I was hesitating, Chitanda and Satoshi gave their judgment on the theory respectively.

"I believe we cannot ignore such a long time interval."

"Me too. 'Cultural Festival' was mentioned just before the 'one year since' sentence, after all, so I think the dropping out happened in October."

Upon my silent nodding, the other two expressed their agreement.

Three against one. Ibara gave a displeased look.

"Ugh-, you guys are so picky with your details."

Though that cute reaction didn't exactly fit her style, it did help relieve the tense atmosphere a bit. Satoshi tried to smooth things over by saying in a casual manner, "But at least the way you approached it was good, I think."

Chitanda also broke her extremely serious look and smiled in agreement.

"Indeed. Reviews need not be too radical."

I think so as well. How do I say this, it felt like looking at a map in the middle of a foggy maze, or being frustrated because something did not go as planned. If only 'Hyouka' and 'Unity and Salutations' were considered, then Ibara's theory probably wouldn't feel so limited. All that was left now was Satoshi's data and me wrapping things up. And if any fatal contradictions occurred, all I had to do was think of a solution before my turn was up.

Come to think of it, what were my notes about anyway? All I knew was that we were supposed to pool the notes together, but I haven't gone around to actually reading mine in earnest.

"Well, this ends my turn, right?"

Chitanda nodded at Ibara's question.

Following the clockwise order, next would be Satoshi. At Chitanda's prompting, Satoshi began distributing his notes. He then stopped suddenly and said cheerfully, "Ah yes, I forgot to mention. Some of my notes disprove Mayaka's hypothesis."

The copies we received were a copy of the "Kami High Monthly". That reminds me, Toogaito said that they're approaching their 400th issue already. If they publish ten issues per year on average, then that means they've been around for nearly 40 years. I should have realized they would of course have a back issue from 33 years ago... One of the articles was highlighted with a circle around it.

Only a small section of the copy was relevant to what we were discussing, but that was clearly enough to disprove Ibara's theory. Such was the basis of Satoshi's confidence when he said that. Perhaps he was trying to maintain consistency with the other speakers... Taking a quick glance at Ibara, she revealed a rather complicated expression that was neither happy nor unhappy. That was to be expected, as Satoshi started his speech by commenting on her theory and not on Chitanda's. Though Satoshi was probably just imitating Ibara when he said his notes disproved the previous speaker's hypothesis. Naturally, it was one of his usual jokes.

▼ Following the disturbances in the Special Purposes Block last week, which left a stain on the honour and pride of the arts-related clubs of Kamiyama High School, two of the perpetrators have been suspended, with five others given serious warnings. ▼ Of course, there is honour even amongst thieves. For the Film Studies Club said they were not going to just sit around and accept this harsh punishment, while the Photography Club insisted that they were 100% right all along. Though this paper would not go so far as to proclaim that. ▼ For the problem remains that this conflict was resolved with fists. Ignoring the efforts taken to resolve this through dialogue, certain people of extremist thought have decided to take the easy yet pathetic option of violence. ▼ We urge the third-year members of the Film Studies Club to repent for their senseless beating of Sachimura Yukiko-san (New Theatre Club, Class 1-D), who was acting as mediator during the negotiations. Currently Sachimura-san is being hospitalized as we publish this. ▼ The legendary movements of two years ago would not have resorted to such violence. Even though we are all infuriated by what has happened lately, we must not allow this to shatter our solidarity, and we must persevere with our civil disobedience. ▼ Only then can we live on knowing that we have lived up to our tradition and honour.

Satoshi began to explain with a calm face,

"My findings come from this back issue of the 'Kami High Monthly'. I stumbled upon this hibernating in the library archives, so I decided to read it in order to kill some time after school. However, it makes no direct mention of the incident 33 years ago, and this is all that it said concerning that event. To be honest, I think we're going in circles with this piece here. Though this is called a back issue, only half is readable as it's poorly

preserved. It's got all sorts of notes written all over it in felt tip marker, guess it can't be helped. Anyway, here are the main points:"

- The incident was not resolved by violence
- The incident affected the entire school
- In the midst of the incident, "we" became united
- Civil disobedience was observed throughout the incident

"The first and last points may be contradictory, but they're related to the same thing. Since the incident wasn't resolved by violence, this is where Mayaka's theory needs amending. The middle two points are nearly identical. While it's not entirely certain whether the 'we' here represents the entire school, it's safe to assume that this doesn't really matter too much."

Really...?

I wasn't fully satisfied with that explanation. As though sensing that, Satoshi added, "Put it this way. If 'we' means the entire school, then naturally the entire student body is involved. If it doesn't, it still means 'we' decided to back up whoever is concerned. Am I right?"

I see.

"That wraps up my report. Any questions?"

Silence followed. Chitanda asked again just to be safe, "... Are there any questions?"

Oh yeah. As though just thinking of something, I raised my hand.

"Satoshi, this 'legendary movement' mentioned here, is it entirely different to the incident we're investigating? It feels suspicious just reading this copy alone."

I was merely asking in order to confirm something. As I had anticipated, Satoshi shook his head.

"Dunno. There's no evidence that says whether that's the incident we're looking for."

"Dunno, you say..."

Though he sounded calm, his response was reckless. Though his knowledge was deep and plentiful, he can be rather indifferent as to how he used it..

"Then your information is pretty much useless."

"Really, thought so."

"What do you mean thought so!?"

Ibara interrupted, "There's evidence to support that, after all."

"Really?"

"The incident that we're looking into caused quite an uproar, right? We knew that from the anthologies of two clubs. This incident and the 'legendary movement' are different events, since even if they are similar, one of them is clearly labelled 'legendary' here, right?"

Satoshi clapped his palms together.

"Ah, that's right. So that's why it says that. You're amazing, Mayaka."

Nope, I don't think you even gave thought to that before. I see, what Ibara said does make sense. If we cannot ascertain whether two objects are the same, then we'll just assume that they're different to begin with, provided the assumption is logical as Ibara has done. Besides, I wouldn't waste my energy going through so much trouble just to look for evidence. I waved my hand to gesture that I accepted the explanation.

There were no other questions asked.

"Now then, let's hear your hypothesis,"

However, Satoshi smiled bitterly upon being asked.

"Umm, hypothesis, huh?"

"Is something wrong?"

"Chitanda-san, I don't mean to disrupt the order of the meeting, but I can't seem to make any theory whatsoever. Though I did say we'll do our own research, all I've found is this anthology... The best I could do is to amend Ibara's theory. After all,"

I knew Satoshi was now going to bring out one of his mottos: *Conclusions cannot...*

"Conclusions cannot be made from databases alone."

In the end, Satoshi didn't come up with any theories. Guess it can't be helped, not that I had much expectations from him anyway.

Though the problem now lied with me. Darn, I now regret not having read my research materials. I did have a theory in mind already, so I ignored the wavering in my heart and proceeded with the meeting.

"Now then, Oreki-san, you may start anytime."

I nodded and handed out the copies, while taking a quick glance at my own copy as I did so. Like Satoshi's material, my copy itself did not contain much that was of much relevance to the incident. It was nothing but a listing of dry facts; that was the information that I researched.

1967

Events in Japan and the World

- Japan's Gross National Product exceeds 45 trillion yen to become the 3rd largest economy in the capitalist world. By 1968, it is expected to leapfrog West Germany to 2nd place.
- Lightning strikes on a group of Fukushima High School students from Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, while they were hiking at Mt Nishiho, leaving 11 dead.^[6]
- Student activism in Waseda University escalates with students participating in massive strikes^[7]

Events in Kamiyama High School

○ April: In a speech by Principal Eida Tasuku: "We must not allow ourselves to be complacent and become a mere backwater school. The nurture of talent should be what education is all about. Secondary education should be about nurturing talents to prepare for tertiary education." A change in how the school is governed is alluded.

○ June 13th: "Cultural Festival Consideration Committee" held after lessons.

○ July: Observation tour in America. (Led by Manninbashi-sensei)

☐ October 13th-17th: Cultural Festival.

☐ October 31st: Sports Festival.

☐ November 15th-18th: 2nd Year Field Trip - Takamatsu, Miyajima and Akiyoshidai.

○ December 2nd: In light of recent consecutive traffic accidents, students are assembled in order to raise awareness of traffic safety.

○ January 12th: Sports Equipment Storage Room partially damaged due to heavy snow.

☐ January 23rd-24th: 1st Year Skiing Course.

"Houtarou, could this be..."

I replied with a sour expression, "Yup, recorded from 'Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years'. It is as you have seen..."

Having seen how the other three have presented their materials, if I were to imitate them, I would have to summarize my findings.

.....

... But there's hardly anything for me to summarize.

It's not like I brought this material with much thought anyway. Looking at it another way, this material simply didn't have much meaning to it.

The next few moments were spent with me at a loss for what to do next. Since this was only a request from a female student, as well as a club assignment, I wasn't going to get stiff because of it. It's more my style to say "Sorry guys, I can't think of anything," and let Chitanda and Ibara take care of the rest.

But even this option was a bit too grey-coloured for me.

"Excuse me. Before I go on, I need to go to the bathroom first."

Chitanda couldn't help but giggle.

"Yes, of course."

"You nervous?" Satoshi said as though trying to calm me, but I had no intention of letting him do so. Chitanda stood up and showed me the way. As I followed her, I casually placed my copy into my pocket.

I began to think as I was led to the wide bathroom.

Four copies of paper. Four pieces of material.

And then, the debating that would follow.

What is the answer that links them all? What happened 33 years ago?

I went into thinking...

And finally came to a conclusion.

"Sorry guys, as I was thinking in a different direction, I didn't bother coming up with a hypothesis. So can I just jump straight to the conclusion since I'm the last one to speak?"

Upon hearing my suggestion, Satoshi smiled mischievously.

"Houtarou, you have something in mind?"

"Stop reading my mind... Anyway, I'll explain briefly."

"I,"

Chitanda took a breath before continuing, "I think that won't be enough. If there's anyone that can come up with a hypothesis without any contradictions, it is you, Oreki-san,"

.....

W, well, I dunno about that.

"Let us hear your theory, Oreki-san."

"Yeah, c'mon. Tell us already."

"I'm quite looking forward to it, after all we've discussed."

They're already deciding on their own... While I'm not exactly under pressure, it's quite difficult to speak with so many people staring at me. Now then, where do I start? I thought for a while and said, "Alright, I'll go with the good old 5W1H method. When, where, who, why, how and what... I've got them all listed, right?"

Chitanda nodded.

"Good. Anyway, first, 'when'. We know it happened 33 years ago, but we don't know whether it's June or October. If the 'Unity and Salutations' is right, then it's June, while based on the description on 'Hyouka', it feels more like October. However, as both sources are quite reliable, I would say the incident occurred in June while 'Sempai's' dropping out happened in October."

Looking disgruntled, Ibara raised her brows, as it was just a while ago that I pointed out the contradictions in her theory. I ignored her and continued, "Next, 'where'. There's no problem answering that: At Kamiyama High School. 'Who', according to the 'Unity and Salutations', we know the main

character is Sekitani Jun, the Classics Club president. Allow me to extend this a bit here, the main character is actually the entire student body, Sekitani is just one of the many protagonists."

While I was quite sure there were no mistakes so far, my eyes would occasionally glance down at my notes as I spoke. So far so good, now for the main course.

"'Why'. If the entire student body were up in arms, then their adversary would naturally be the teaching staff. To quote from Ibara, their 'independence was threatened'.

"And the cause for the incident was the Cultural Festival itself."

As I laid down my conclusion, I could feel everyone looking at me with questioning eyes. I felt like I might have a heart attack at any moment.

"... Was that mentioned somewhere?"

"Though it did mention about a dropping out during the Cultural Festival, it doesn't say how the festival itself has anything to do with it."

I shook my head.

"No, it has everything to do with it. My conclusion comes from a conversation the students had with the teaching staff, which resulted in the Cultural Festival being carried out in October as usual."

Satoshi stared at the 'Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years' and commented, "You mean this 'Cultural Festival Consideration Committee' thing, right? But why do you think this was the cause of the incident? Even without that thing, wouldn't they still have gone on with the annual Cultural Festival?"

"No, you're mistaken. Since I took the trouble of copying from this 'Walking Together for 50 Years', have a closer look."

Besides Satoshi, Chitanda and Ibara too took a glance, and then, "Each event is marked by either a circle or square!"

"... I get it! The squares indicate regular events, while the circles mark specific events for that year!"

"You're not too far off. You'd probably find such events that don't grind well with the regular events for other years as well."

I then switched the copy of 'Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years' to that of 'Hyouka' and went on, "Why was there a committee for the consideration of the Cultural Festival 33 years ago? This was in response to the students' strong demands concerning the event itself. Why

would the students demand that such a committee be set up? The hint can be found in 'Hyouka',"

I took a ball pen and underlined a few lines.

"Here, 'During this year, Sempai has fallen into legend and become a hero. As a result, the five day Cultural Festival will commence as usual.' Don't you find something strange with this line?"

As nobody said anything, I continued, "We knew the Cultural Festival would commence as usual, yet why would the author add something so trivial? This means our attention should not be on 'commence as usual', but on the words 'five days'."

"... What are you talking about? I don't get it. I don't quite follow what you're trying to say, Oreki. What about those words anyway?"

"I'm saying the Hero's achievement is that the Cultural Festival gets to be held for five days. Let us return to the 'Walking Together for 50 Years' and observe the Principal's speech in April. If you just read it literally, its simply a message encouraging students to focus on their academic studies. However, I'd like you to read between the lines.

"Our school's cultural festival is held during weekdays. For five full days. This is particularly long compared to other schools. Hence the Cultural Festival became a symbol of our school's club activities. What if the Principal was hinting at the students to focus more on their studies over their club activities... This would mean that the Cultural Festival would be shortened. But the students were having none of it, hence they were 'infuriated' by it. That is the cause of the incident - the 'why'."

I sighed and noticed I was getting thirsty. I felt like getting a cup of barley tea... But before I finish my speech, I'll just have to make do with my saliva and continue.

"Now, 'how'. 'Thanks to the Classics Club president Sekitani Jun's heroic support', the students carried out some 'bold pragmatism'. Finally, 'what'. Being incensed by the school's decision, the students decided on a policy of 'civil disobedience' while refraining from violence. The result was that the Cultural Festival Consideration Committee was held and the Cultural Festival retains its five day duration. In a strict sense, there was no violence involved that led to such an outcome. The same cannot be said for the wider context though. I'm not entirely sure, but massive non-violent protests would involve something like... hunger strikes, demonstrations and skipping classes. I'm sure Satoshi's more familiar with this subject. In the end, due to mounting student pressure, the school was forced to relent on

their decision to shorten the Cultural Festival. Yet the price was for the 'Hero' Sekitani Jun to leave school."

I added one more thing.

"As for why there's a time gap between the incident and the dropping out, I would guess that as Sekitani Jun was a central figure in the student movement in June, if he dropped out then, it would just have created a bigger uproar. So his dropping out was delayed until everyone's passion had cooled down after the Cultural Festival."

I took a small breath as I finished my explanation. *Phew*. I could sense the summer heat returning.

This pretty much ends my explanation.

Someone clapped his hands indifferently. It was Satoshi.

"Wow, that sure was amazing, Houtarou. Now I see."

Ibara began to silently collect her notes. While she looked rather displeased, that was just her usual self.

And as for Chitanda.

Like an excited kid that had just seen a circus performance, our lady opened her mouth and said, "That was wonderful, Oreki-san! You have managed to come up with such a conclusion with just the materials we have here... I was right to have requested your help!"

Even I would feel good being praised. I could sense myself getting embarrassed.

Looks like we've solved Chitanda's problem and created some materials to write for our own anthology now. Ever since meeting Chitanda at the end of April, all this bothersome stuff would finally come to an end.

As chairperson, Chitanda had to continue her role and asked, "Are there any further questions?"

As there were none, Chitanda gave a big nod and concluded, "Then we shall publish our essay anthology this year based on Oreki-san's conclusions. The details will be discussed on another day. For now this meeting is adjourned... Thanks for all the hard work."

We all said our farewells.

Chitanda led me to the entrance as I left. From her smile, I could tell how satisfied she was with how things went today.

"I am deeply grateful."

She said and bowed deeply.

"It's not me alone,"

I said and put on my shoes. Satoshi, who had gone outside before me, gestured to me to hurry up. As I'm not familiar with the way here, I had no choice but to let Satoshi lead me out.

"Well then, we shall meet again at school,"

"Yeah, I'm off..."

I waved my hand to bid farewell to the Chitanda residence.

As I'd already left, naturally I had no idea what Chitanda was doing after that.

After I departed, she stood by her entrance with an expression as though she had just realized something, and so I did not know what she had whispered to herself then.

She probably said something along the lines of,

"But... why did I end up crying that day?"

7 - The Truth of the Historic Classics Club

In the evening after a lengthy debate, I leisurely pedaled my bike in the farmlands drenched by the orange sunset, and struggled to listen to Satoshi's soft voice.

"To be honest I'm quite surprised, Houtarou. Indeed I'm surprised by what you said there. If you're right, then our Kanya Festival owes its existence to the expense of one person's high school life. However, I'm even more surprised that you're able to deduce all that."

"You're doubting my ability?"

I replied jokingly, yet for once Satoshi didn't smile when he answered, "You've been solving riddles ever since enrolling at Kami High. During our first meeting with Chitanda-san, or the case of the popular book that nobody reads, as well as the one with the Wall Newspaper Club president."

"They just happened by chance."

"Yet the results mean that didn't matter. Yet the problem is why would someone like you who finds solving riddles to be bothersome end up solving them? The answer is simple when you think about it. You're doing it for Chitanda-san."

I turned my head, and wondered whether that was true.

"Doing it for Chitanda" wasn't exactly right, I think I would accept it if the reason was worded as "it's all Chitanda's fault". I remember Satoshi saying something this aptly as well before, that I wouldn't take action unless someone asks me to do so. While she didn't ask me directly, it's true that I ended up doing something bothersome for her, but...

"Today's different."

Yeah, today's different.

"You can be good at drawing attention to yourself as well, you know? Today, the job of solving the riddle was supposed to be done equally between the four of us. You could have chosen to run away saying you didn't get any of it, and none of us would have said anything. Yet why did you still seek out the answer yourself under the pretext of going to the bathroom?"

The sun continued to set, and I could feel the breeze of the wind. I moved my eyes away from Satoshi's gaze and looked forward.

"Wasn't it because you were doing it for Chitanda-san?"

Satoshi's question was quite right. Normally, I wouldn't have bothered to solve such a puzzle. I guess I was extremely active today.

Yes... that has to be it.

Why did I act as I did today? I think I more or less understood the reason, and it had almost nothing to do with Chitanda. However, understanding something myself was different from getting someone else to understand it as well. Without refining my knowledge and vocabulary base, I was not able to convey my thoughts to others, not even to a telepath like Satoshi.

No, rather than that, I think it's because I've known Satoshi for so long that explaining becomes difficult. Since my actions and motives today were a departure from my usual *modus operandi*.

Still, I had no obligation to explain myself to him. I could have said it had nothing to do with him. Yet I felt like answering Satoshi, as well as organizing my thoughts for my own sake. So after a long silence, I gave my answer after choosing my words.

"... I guess, I'm just tired of having a grey-coloured life."

"?"

"Ever since meeting Chitanda, my energy efficiency levels have fallen to their lowest levels. She would prepare making essay anthologies as a club president, take exams as a student, and seek out her past as a human being. That's quite tiring for me. You and Ibara are the same, spending time on all sorts of worthless endeavors."

"Well... I guess."

"But you know, sometimes I do think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence."

I stopped speaking right there, as I realized I could have phrased that in a better way. Yet I couldn't think of anything better than that, and so I continued, "Whenever I look at you guys, I can't bring myself to calm down. I want to stay calm, yet I don't find anything interesting in that."

"....."

"So at the very least, I wanted to, how'd you put it, solve the riddle. I wanted to have a taste of your way of life."

I shut my mouth after that. Amidst the sound of the pedals and the breeze, Satoshi said nothing. Satoshi was normally talkative, yet there were times when he couldn't say anything, and I was quite mindful of that, as I wanted

him to say something. I'll just think of an excuse later, for now, I couldn't stand this silence any longer.

"Well, say something,"

I could sense Satoshi smiling even though I couldn't see it as he spoke at last.

"I think..."

"Hmm?"

"I think you're actually envious of those with a rose-coloured life."

I replied without thinking, "Maybe."

Staring at the ceiling in my own room, it was white as usual.

I ruminated on what Satoshi said earlier.

Even I liked hearing fun stuff, which includes silly jokes and popular music. Even though I got spun around by Chitanda, it was still a good way to kill time.

However, with all due respect to all comedic acts out there, what if I become obsessed with these things regardless of time and effort... Would it have been much more entertaining for me? Would it have been worthwhile despite being detrimental to my energy efficiency?

For example, Chitanda's pursuit of her past.

And more importantly, how the "Hero" Sekitani Jun ended up protecting the Kanya Festival 33 years ago, according to my deductions.

My vision just couldn't focus on a single spot. It's as I thought, whenever I think about this, I just couldn't remain calm. I turned my eyes from the ceiling to the floor I'm lying on and saw the letter that my sis sent me lying there.

My gaze was drawn to one of the lines written in it.

I'm sure I'll look back ten years from now and view every day I'm out here without regret.

Ten years later, for a mere human like me, is just a hazy future after all. I would be 25 by then. Looking back at myself ten years before, I wonder if I'll look back and ponder about the things I did and could have done.

Perhaps Sekitani Jun, as a 25 year old, would also be looking back on when he was 15 with some regret as well.

I...

Suddenly the phone rang.

No, it's not like I've never heard a phone ring before. It's just that I was so immersed in my thoughts that it felt sudden. I left my anxiety behind as my mind returned to reality, and got up and headed downstairs to answer the phone.

"... Hello, this is Oreki."

"Huh? Houtarou?"

I felt my spine tingling in nervousness. It was a familiar voice, one that could mess up my lifestyle, and get me involved in all sorts of meta-level trouble. It was a call from Oreki Tomoe, wandering somewhere in Western Asia and hiding in the Japanese Consulate from the pursuit of Mossad agents. As it was an international call, it was hard to listen to, but there was no mistake that it was her.

Without fail, I gave my honest response upon hearing the voice that I hadn't heard for so long.

"So you're still alive?"

"How rude, you think I'd get killed by one or two bandits?"

So she actually did go through that? Can't say I'm surprised.

Probably mindful of how expensive the call would get, my sis spoke quickly.

"I arrived at Pristina yesterday. That's in Yugoslavia^[1], by the way. Finances and health are both in good condition and my plans are going along fine. I'll write to you once I get to Sarajevo. If I travel leisurely, I'll get there within two weeks. This ends my report. So how goes things over there?"

My sis sounded happy as usual. Though she's emotionally unstable in that she can get very angry, or cry like there's no tomorrow, or be extremely joyful, generally she's usually just happy.

I flicked the telephone cord with my finger and replied, "Nothing unusual in the Far East Command."

"I see, then..."

My sis was about to hang up. Though I wouldn't have minded if she just hung up, I still spoke.

"We're publishing an anthology, 'Hyouka'..."

"... Huh? What?"

"We looked up Sekitani Jun."

My sis still spoke in a swift manner, "Sekitani Jun? What a nostalgic name. Hmm, never thought that story would still be passed down. Is 'Kanya Festival' still a taboo term?"

I did not get what she meant by that.

"What do you mean?"

"That's a tragedy. I don't like that."

Taboo? Tragedy? Don't like that?

What's she talking about? What's she trying to say?

"Hang on a moment, we're talking about Sekitani Jun, right?"

"Of course. The 'kind hero'. You get it, don't you?"

It was a pointless conversation. Even though we're talking about the same subject, we can't seem to connect.

As for why, I instinctively realized that I could have been mistaken. Perhaps the deduction that I made at the Chitanda residence was mistaken or lacking in some details. Yet I was not feeling impatient, since my sis would know what happened at Kamiyama High School 33 years ago.

"Sis, what do you know about Sekitani Jun?"

I decided to ask her seriously.

All I got was a simple answer.

"I don't have time for that! Bye!"

Click. Beep, beep.

I took the receiver away from my ear and looked at it like an idiot.

"..."

... Why this...

"Stupid sister!"

I slammed the receiver on the phone, causing it to shake with a loud noise. My irritation was now doubled, thanks to my sis.

I no longer remembered what my sis said exactly, as the conversation happened so quickly there was no time for me to verify it. Still, the part where she replied negatively concerning the incident was fresh in my mind.

I went back to my bed and took out everything the Classics Club had collected concerning the incident from my bag. 'Hyouka', the 'Unity and Salutation', the 'Kami High Monthly' and the 'Kamiyama High School: Walking Together for 50 Years'... I also placed the letter my sis sent from Istanbul alongside those as I once again read that line that got my attention.

I'm sure I'll look back ten years from now and view every day I'm out here without regret.

Ten years from now, huh? As Sekitani Jun was president 33 years ago, if he's still alive he would be about 50 by now. Would he still look back at his high school life without regret?

I think he wouldn't. The "hero" that sacrificed himself for the passion of his comrades and forsook his choice to continue his high school education would have no regrets for making such a decision. Ever since my deduction at the Chitanda residence, that was what I thought.

But was that really true?

It was just a Cultural Festival, yet it led to the school coming after him and changed his life. If life in high school is rose-coloured, then would such an intensely rose-coloured life that gets interrupted still be called rosy?

The grey-coloured part in me told me this wasn't so. Sacrificing oneself so that his comrades would be forgiven, would a hero endure something like that? That thought surfaced in my mind. Though I still resisted such a thought, I could not ignore the fact that my sis had called the incident a tragedy.

I needed to revise this once again. I took out all the copies that mentioned that incident.

And so, I began to inquire whether Sekitani Jun's life was really rose-coloured 33 years ago.

The following day, I headed to school dressed in my casual wear. In order to confirm something, I called Chitanda, Ibara and Satoshi out as well. All I said to them was simply this, "There's something else I needed to add to yesterday's deduction before this can be fully concluded. I'll be waiting at the Geology Room."

And so the three of them came. Ibara was bound to treat my bringing up a supposedly resolved problem with sarcasm, and while Satoshi was smiling, the look of surprise at me deviating from my usual behaviour could still be seen. As for Chitanda, she spoke upon seeing me.

"Oreki-san, I feel like there's still something that I need to know."

I felt the same way as well. As I nodded, I placed my hand on her shoulder.

"It's fine. I think we should be able to sort this out by today. Just hang on a bit longer."

"What do you mean by adding to yesterday's deduction, Oreki?"

"Adding means taking the final step in order to complete something that is still incomplete."

"I don't get it, are you saying we've been looking into this the wrong way or heading into the wrong conclusion?"

"Just hear me out."

As I took out my notes, I glanced at it myself rather than showing it to the rest.

"... 'Hyouka' was meant to be written as something more important. It was not meant to chronicle the life of Sekitani Jun or made as a heroic tale, that's what the preface says anyway."

That was the part that Satoshi covered yesterday. As expected, he spoke up.

"Isn't that the part we discussed yesterday?"

"Yeah, but perhaps we may have been misled."

"What do you mean?"

"This passage here, 'As a sacrifice of the conflict, even Sempai's smile would end up along the flow of time into eternity.' The 'sacrifice' here does not mean giving up voluntarily, rather, it means 'sacrifice' as an offering."

Ibara raised her eyebrow.

"But wouldn't they have used 'victim' instead of 'sacrifice' then?"

'Victim' huh? Though I didn't need to do much explaining, as Chitanda covered for me.

"No, 'sacrifice' can also be involuntarily. It used to mean just that in the past."^[2]

As expected from an honours student, that was quick. And I was just about to get a dictionary.

Satoshi commented with a sigh, "... I get what you're trying to say about a different meaning to that word, but isn't that obvious? Besides, there's no way we could find out which meaning is true without asking the author first."

Of course, the difference in meaning was not purely a linguistic problem. As language was never as precise as math, it was natural that words would have more than one meaning. So it's not possible to conclude that a word means something else completely.

Yet there was a way to solve this. I nodded confidently to Satoshi and said, "Well, then we'll just have to ask the author."

"... Who is it?"

"The one who wrote this foreword, of course. Kooriyama Youko-san was a first year student 33 years ago. She should be around 48 or 49 now."

Chitanda's eyes widened.

"So did you find her?"

I brusquely shook my head.

"I don't have to. Since she's very close by anyway."

Ibara raised her head. As expected, she was the first to figure it out.

"Oh! I see!"

"That's right."

"What do you mean?"

"What have you figured out?"

Ibara looked at me, and I nodded softly to urge her to explain.

"... It's Itoikawa-sensei the Head Librarian, isn't it? Itoikawa Youko-sensei, her maiden name was Kooriyama. Am I right?"

As Ibara was a librarian herself, she naturally knew the full name of Itoikawa, that's why she was quick to realize.

"Exactly. If you merely heard the name 'Ibara Satoshi' without seeing how it's spelled, then you have no way of guessing whether Satoshi has adopted Ibara's name. But since we know Itoikawa's given name is spelled 'Youko', as well as the fact her age matches, then figuring out her maiden name becomes elementary."

Crossing her arms, Ibara began spouting her cynical sarcasm.

"You really are weird. Even I couldn't realize such a thing despite being in contact with Sensei all the time, yet you managed to do that. Maybe you should get Chi-chan to have a look inside your head."

As I said before, I got lucky with a flash of inspiration. I also do not want to be lobotomized by Chitanda.

Meanwhile, Chitanda's face was slowly getting redder.

"T, then, if we hear from Itoikawa-sensei..."

"Then we'll know what happened 33 years ago. Why that was not a heroic tale, why the cover was designed that way, why the anthology was titled 'Hyouka'... We'll get all the answers concerning your uncle."

"But, do you have any proof that it's really Itoikawa-sensei? Wouldn't it be awkward if it turns out to be someone else?"

We won't be mistaken. I took a look at my wristwatch and reckoned it was about time.

"Actually, I did make sure of that. I found out she was club president in her second year. I made an appointment to speak with her about it. It should be about time now, let's head to the library."

As I turned to leave, I could hear Ibara mutter, "You sure are enthusiastic." I guess I am.

During summer vacation, the library would have its window blinds down to protect the books from exposure to intense sunlight. In this moderate air-conditioned indoor environment, the library was still packed with students preparing for the Kanya Festival or third years preparing for their university entrance exams. Itoikawa could be seen writing something while sitting behind the counter, wearing a pair of glasses which we did not see last time as she wrote. She had a rather small figure, and wrinkles were visible on her face, proof that it's been nearly 31 years since she graduated from high school.

"Itoikawa-sensei,"

She turned and noticed us as we called out to her. Lifting her face, she smiled.

"Ah, the Classics Club,"

She looked around the library and said, "It's a bit crowded here, shall we head to the Librarian Office?"

And led us to an office behind the counter.

The Librarian Office was a cozy office big enough for one person to work in, though the air-conditioner was considerably smaller in here. As the blinds weren't down, Itoikawa went ahead and lowered them as she gestured for

us to take a seat on the guest sofa. A soft fragrance could be smelled, as it came from a flower pot placed on the only table in the room. It was a very ordinary and easy to miss flower, and was probably not meant for the guests but for herself to admire.

Though the sofa was large, it was still not big enough for the four of us. So Itoikawa had to take out a folding chair and place it beside the sofa. But why was it me that ended up on the folding chair while the other three got the sofa? Itoikawa sat on her own revolving chair. Placing her elbows on the table, she faced us and said, "Well, what is it that you wish to speak to me about?"

She asked gently. As she was asking everyone from the Classics Club, it was natural that I would have to speak on behalf of the club. I tried to shrug off this urge to cross my arms and legs in a situation which I was not used to, and courteously replied, "Yes, there's something we would like to inquire from you. But first, we'd like to confirm something. Is your maiden name Kooriyama?"

She nodded.

"Then that means this was written by you, right?"

I took out the copy from my pocket and handed to her. Itoikawa moved her eyes across the piece of paper and smiled gently,

"Yes, that's me. But I'm surprised that this managed to get preserved."

She then seemed to lower her gaze to me.

"I think I know what it is that you wanted to discuss with me. To have students from the Classics Club inquire about my maiden name, I had an idea what was going on... you wish to know about the movement 33 years ago, right?"

Bingo, so she does know.

However, in contrast to the expectation shown on our expressions, Itoikawa merely sighed.

"But, why would you ask about such a distant event now? It would have been better to forget about it."

"Well, this is mainly thanks to Chitanda here viewing all sorts of curious events like a beast, or I would not have noticed this event to begin with."

"A beast?"

"Sorry, I meant like a feast."^[3]

Itoikawa and Satoshi both smiled, while Ibara gave an exasperated look. Chitanda protested softly, though I ignored her. Itoikawa smiled softly at Chitanda and asked, "And why were you interested in that movement back then?"

I noticed Chitanda gripping her fists on her knees. She was probably nervous as she answered briefly, "Sekitani Jun was my uncle."

Itoikawa let out a gasp.

"Oh, I see, Sekitani Jun... Such a nostalgic name. How is he?"

"I have no idea, as he was reported missing in India."

She gasped again, "Oh." Though she didn't seem to have wavered. Perhaps living for 50 years meant she'd seen it all?

"I see. And I had always wished to meet him once again."

"So do I. I just wanted to see him one more time."

Was Sekitani Jun a person that was worth meeting once again? I couldn't help but wonder perhaps I should meet him as well.

As though filled with emotions, Chitanda spoke slowly.

"Itoikawa-sensei, please tell me, what exactly happened 33 years ago? Why was the incident my uncle was involved in not a heroic tale? Why is the Classics Club anthology titled 'Hyouka'? ... Are Oreki-san's deductions correct?"

"Deductions?"

Itoikawa asked me, "What do you mean by that?"

Satoshi answered, "Sensei, Oreki has managed to deduce what could have happened 33 years ago using the limited information we have gathered. So perhaps you should hear it from him."

Seems like I have to repeat what I had said yesterday. No, though I had intended to do so anyway, I had not yet realized that it could just be speculation for someone who had gone through the incident herself. Though I was confident of my deductions, there was a small thought that I might have gotten it wrong. I licked my lips and began my explanation using the same 5W1H method as yesterday.

"First, the main character for this incident..."

"... And so, we concluded that the dropping out occurred in October."

Once I got it all out, I was surprised by how well I managed to organize my thoughts. As I spoke without referring to any notes, time seemed to pass by even faster.

All the time while I spoke, Itoikawa remained silent. She spoke to Ibara at once as I finished.

"Ibara-san, do you have the notes that you speak of?"

"No, I..."

"I got them."

Satoshi opened his drawstring bag and took out a stack of notes which was folded in quarters, and handed them over to Itoikawa. She took a quick glance at them and looked up.

"You managed to form a deduction just from all these?"

Chitanda nodded.

"Yes, Oreki-san did."

That's not exactly right.

"I merely pooled their theories together, that's all."

"Still,"

Sigh. Itoikawa breathed out a sigh and placed the notes on the table as she crossed her legs.

"I'm amazed."

"It wasn't wrong?"

Ibara asked, to which she shook her head.

"No, it is just as Oreki-kun said. Everything is true. It feels uncanny, as though you stood alongside me as I watched the whole thing unfold back then."

I let out a breath.

I was indeed relieved that I got it all right.

"Well, what else do you wish to ask from me? I might even give you a passing mark if my answers match your speculation."

"Well, I don't know about me, but Houtarou seemed to feel something else was missing."

Yeah, something was missing.

There was something that I wanted to ask: Did Sekitani Jun forsake his rose-coloured high school life on his own? I worded my question as follows, "I have only one question. Did Sekitani Jun wish to become a shield for the entire student body?"

Itoikawa's gentle expression suddenly froze at hearing that question. She merely looked at me.

"..."

And stared silently.

I waited for her to speak, so too did Chitanda, Ibara and Satoshi. They were probably wondering what that question was all about as they waited.

... The silence didn't last long. Itoikawa moved her mouth as though murmuring something, and said reproachfully, "You really saw through me... Then I shall tell you about it. I think it's best I start from the beginning all the way to the end. Though it was a long time ago, I still remember it clearly."

And so, the former Kooriyama Youko spoke about the "Struggle in June" 33 years ago.

"Though the Cultural Festival is just as active as it was then, it feels more quiet than it used to be. Back then everyone viewed the Kami High Cultural Festival as their ultimate objective in life. It was a time when people would actively discard the old and welcome the new, and some say it was from this overflowing energy that the Kami High Cultural Festival came into being.

"Just before I enrolled in this school, there was a feeling that a riot would break out. Nothing good would come out of having a commotion go out of control, right? Yet compared to the violent school incidents in recent years, the movements back then seemed rather orderly. Though for the teachers of that time, it was still considered unacceptable."

The recollection that I heard seemed to concern some Modern Japanese History. I think neither those people overflowing with energy in that time nor people born in the same period as me could ever fathom the existence of the other group.

"In April that year, the Principal suddenly had an outburst during a staff meeting. I believe it was recorded in one of your notes here, 'We must not allow ourselves to be complacent and become a mere backwater school.'

Nowadays people would just view Principal Eida's words as merely laying expectation on the students to do well. Yet back then, it was perceived as a veiled message to crack down on the Cultural Festival.

"When the timetable for the Cultural Festival was announced, there was a great uproar. The usual five day schedule was drastically reduced to only two days, and they were moved from weekdays to just two days in the weekend, as though they were being discarded from the regular school calendar altogether. Everyone felt like a bucket of cold water was poured over them and found the decision hard to stomach.

"Since that announcement, I could feel the atmosphere at school becoming tense, as though something was about to happen.

"First, all sorts of dirty language was being posted on the school's notice boards. Then there were the public speeches, which is where everyone could come on stage to say whatever they want, where everyone was getting increasingly passionate and received applause. Then the movement began in earnest when it was proposed to pool the resources of the arts-related clubs together.

"However, though the resistance was expected, nobody seemed to be prepared for the school's strong response to forcefully carry out the cutting down of the Cultural Festival. In order to carry out the movement, one must be prepared to accept the consequences. Though everyone was good at talking the talk, pathetically, no one volunteered to come out and become the leader of the club alliance."

Itoikawa shifted in her seat, which created a squeaking sound in her chair as she continued, "So it was decided to draw lots in order to choose the leader, and your uncle, Sekitani Jun, ended up with the short end of the stick. The actual operation of the movement was handled by other people, yet their names would never appear in public.

"The movement steadily gathered steam, and eventually led to the school relenting their plans to shorten the festival. As written in your notes, the festival went on as usual."

Though she described it plainly without any emotion, I could still feel the atmosphere of 33 years ago, whether it was the passion of the movement or the cowardice of the representatives, they were all in the past now.

Itoikawa then went on, "But we overdid it. During the movement, I took part in boycotting lessons. Everyone was on the grounds shouting slogans. The construction of a campfire brought the atmosphere to a climax, and then one night it happened.

"The flames in the campfire went out of control. We don't know if someone did it on purpose, but the Martial Arts Dojo was set on fire. Though the fire was eventually put out, the considerably old dojo was badly damaged by the water sprayed from the fire engines."

Chitanda and Ibara's expressions went stiff, I guess so did mine. Even we could tell this sounded bad, as indirectly, it meant this damage of school property could not be ignored.

"Such a criminal act was way out of the ordinary, and could not be overlooked. Fortunately, the school did not wish to make things any worse and so decided not to involve the police. Though no one could argue against the school finding someone to take responsibility once the Cultural Festival was over... Since everyone would be saying they didn't know anything once the festival ended.

"And so, while the cause of the fire was unknown, the one that ended up taking the blame was none other than Sekitani-san, the official leader of the movement.

"Back then, it was much easier to expel a student. Credit to him, Sekitani-san remained calm to the very end. Though I believe your question was whether he wished to become a shield for everyone, right?"

Itoikawa merely smiled and looked at me.

"I think you already know the answer yourself."

After finishing her long story, Itoikawa stood up to pour some hot water from a flask into her coffee mug before drinking it.

We said nothing. Perhaps we couldn't find anything to say. I could only see Chitanda's lips move a bit, as though muttering "how awful", or "how cruel", though I have no idea which it was.

"Well, that's all I have to say. Do you have anything else you wish to ask?"

As she returned to her revolving chair, Itoikawa spoke in her usual tone. This was indeed just a story from the past for her.

Ibara finally broke the silence and said, "Then, I'd like to ask about the cover illustration that was drawn back then..."

Itoikawa nodded silently.

I was reminded of the cover of 'Hyouka', the one with the dog and hare chasing each other, while a number of hares formed a circle and watched

them. The dog probably represented the teaching staff while the hares the students. And the hare that led the dog around in circles was probably Sekitani Jun.

After Itoikawa came gave us the answer that I had just guessed, I asked her, "Of all the buildings in Kami High, the Martial Arts Dojo is by far the oldest, so does that mean it's been rebuilt before?"

I noticed how ancient the dojo was when Chitanda showed it to me back in April, though I gave no thought to that afterwards.

"Yes, that's right. Since public school buildings are rarely renovated unless they reach their sell-by date. When all the other buildings were renovated ten years ago, only the dojo was left untouched since that was renovated before by itself."

Satoshi then said meekly, "Umm, Sensei, I noticed you never referred to the festival as the Kanya Festival,"

As the topic was changed altogether, Itoikawa ended up smiling faintly.

"Why do you even ask? Surely you must have figured it out by now?"

"Huh?"

Kanya Festival?

I see. I remember my sis mentioning in our phone call that the term was considered taboo within the Classics Club. Though it was a bit late, I finally understood why that was taboo.

"It's because Sekitani Jun did not wish to become a hero, right? That's why you refrained from calling the festival the Kanya Festival."

"Fuku-chan, what does he mean by that?"

Though Satoshi smiled while answering, this smile was different from usual in that he wasn't smiling for fun.

"'Kanya' isn't an abbreviation of 'Kamiyama', but rather it's an alternative kanji pronunciation of 'Sekitani'. I managed to find that out at last a while ago. It's probably an alternate name for 'Sekitani Festival', in order to fool the teaching staff while honouring their hero."

... Chitanda then asked, "Sensei, do you know the reason why my uncle used the title 'Hyouka' for the anthology?"

However, Itoikawa gently shook her head.

"That name was probably thought up by Sekitani-san on a whim while he had a feeling he was about to be expelled. He said it meant something that

he could not do in his current state at that time. But otherwise, I don't know what it means myself."

... She doesn't know?

Does she really not know? Or Chitanda, Ibara and Satoshi, for that matter?

Though I rarely get angry, even now I was getting exasperated. Right now all I was feeling was a sense of irritation, as no one seemed to get the message that Sekitani Jun had left behind. I was annoyed that no one managed to get such a trivial message.

Without realizing, I began to speak up, "Don't you guys get it? Just what have you guys been listening to? I'll just come out and say it, it's nothing but a silly pun."

"Houtarou?"

"Sekitani Jun wanted to relay a message to us, the descendants of the Classics Club, and he placed that within the title of the anthology. Chitanda, you're good at English, right?"

Chitanda went flustered at suddenly being called out.

"Eh? E-English?"

"Yeah. This is actually a secret message. No, more like a play on words..."

Itoikawa didn't seem to make any responses while looking at us. I wondered if she could have realized, no she must have realized. Yet for some reason she's not telling us anything. While I didn't understand completely, I tried putting myself in her shoes and noticed this could be something that could not be spoken out loud. Perhaps this was also one of the traditions of the Classics Club?

"Have you figured something out, Oreki-san?"

"Oreki, stop making us guess anymore. Do you really get it?"

"Tell us already, Houtarou."

How many times has it been that I've been pressed for an answer by these guys? I sighed as I prepared to give my explanation. Though this time I felt like this had nothing to do with luck or having any flash of inspiration. I just felt like conveying Sekitani's regret within his pun to someone.

And so I spoke, "What do you think 'Hyouka' means?"

Chitanda answered, "That's the title of the Classics Club anthology."

"I'm asking about the meaning of the word itself."

Satoshi followed, "It's the Japanese word for 'ice', right? So 'ice candy'?"

"Try 'ice cream'."

Ibara spoke, "Ice cream? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Try rearranging the syllables."

Ah, dammit. Why do I always have to go through so much explanation? For once get what I'm trying to say!

"'Ice cream' itself means nothing. That's why I said it's a play on words."

Satoshi's expression first read "I dunno" before his face went pale as though all the blood had been drawn from it. Next was Ibara, who muttered "Ah, that!" with an annoyed expression.

Finally, Chitanda seemed like she still didn't get it. Being an honours student, I hear she's good at English as well. However, it doesn't seem like she's grasped the language's functions completely. I wasn't in the mood to tease her further.

I took the copy of the foreword of 'Hyouka Volume Two' and wrote on it with a ballpen I brought.

"This is the message your uncle left behind."

Chitanda nodded while still looking perplexed.

When she finally understood, her eyes widened instantly. "Oh!" She gasped and went silent.

Everyone's gazes were focused on her.

Chitanda's eyes were moistening. It was then that I realized that her months of requesting my help had finally come to fruition.

"... I remember," she whispered, "I remember now. I asked my uncle back then why the anthology was called 'Hyouka'. He merely said, yes, he told me to be strong.

"It was a message for me to live on whenever I should feel weak, or when I encounter times when I could not scream..."

She turned her gaze towards me.

"Oreki-san, I remember now. I was crying because I was afraid of the thought of living while being dead inside... Thank goodness, now I can send my uncle off properly..."

A smile appeared on her face. Noticing that her eyes were getting wet, she moved to wipe them with her hands. She then turned to look again at the note I was holding. On it was the true meaning of the word that I had written:

I scream.



8 - The Daily Life of the Future Classics Club

And so the Cultural Festival slowly approaches. Looking out at the autumn sky from the Geology Room, I find it quite hard to believe that summer vacation had just ended not long ago. Ever since discovering Sekitani Jun's feelings of regret behind the meaning of the title "Hyouka", we have begun work on compiling our anthology.

Currently, we're still not finished with it.

As I wrote a response to my sis's letter from months ago, a scene of carnage was occurring beside where I was sitting.

"Fuku-chan, are you done yet? The publisher's deadline is coming soon!"

Ibara was nearly screaming as Satoshi had still not completed his allotted number of pages. Even Satoshi, who was normally calm, was beginning to show some anxiety.

"Just a little bit more, just a little bit more. I'm almost there."

"That's what you said a week ago."

Though the senior editor for this anthology was nominally our club president Chitanda, the actual work of distributing page numbers for each author and dealing with the publishers was done by Ibara due to her experience with such work before. Under Ibara's strict schedule, progress in the completion of this edition of "Hyouka" went on smoothly. While I've not yet seen Ibara's manuscript, she'll probably write something about her thoughts on a classical manga series. I remember she said it's called *tera*, *mu* or numbers, or something like that, but somehow I get the feeling she was just randomly picking a title.

On the other hand, Satoshi's unfinished manuscript which Ibara was trying to whip to completion was what Satoshi described as a comedy related to Zeno's paradox. That sounded like a rather random title, though reading the back issues of "Hyouka", it does seem that they publish almost anything. Hence Satoshi decided his "classic paradox" themed title was considered "classic" as well, though I do think he could have come up with something better. As Satoshi was already busy with the Handicraft Club and the Student Council committee, he seemed to be in distress as only a small amount of his allotted pages were filled. It seemed Satoshi wasn't particularly good at writing, which was a surprising weak point I've discovered.

As Satoshi scrambled to write his manuscript with a stiff smile, Ibara walked in circles behind him while looking at her wristwatch. As though remembering something, she turned to speak to me.

"By the way, where's Chi-chan? I needed to talk to her about the budget."

Satoshi looked as though he wanted to say something, but frantically went back to work upon being stared at by Ibara. I had no choice but to stop my writing and answered, "She went to visit the cemetery."

"Cemetery?"

"Sekitani Jun's grave. She wanted to offer those manuscripts in honour of his memory."

"Those manuscripts" referred to a conclusion that we wrote concerning the event 33 years ago. It was written by me with Chitanda's assistance. I refrained from any unnecessary rhetoric and kept the text dry and prose-like.

"I see."

Ibara said without her usual sarcasm, "What else did Chi-chan say?"

"She didn't say anything else."

That wasn't a lie. As I handed the manuscripts over to Chitanda during Sakitani Jun's funeral, as well as today when she visited his grave again, she didn't seem to show any emotion whatsoever. Perhaps she was hiding them, but I didn't think so. That day when the true meaning of "Hyouka" was revealed, Chitanda had considered the matter resolved. She'd probably taken in my explanation since, but I have no idea of knowing.

"Ughh... Fuku-chan, your hand's stopped writing. We only have five minutes left!"

"Five minutes! Mayaka, this is too brutal!"

As the skit beside me resumed once again, I went into thinking. That incident didn't just concern Chitanda herself to begin with, as Ibara and Satoshi have also given their part into solving this mystery.

But what about me?

... As I finished my letter, I placed it in my shoulder bag. I felt sleepy with the blow of the autumn breeze. No hard feelings to the struggling Satoshi and Ibara, I think I'll be going home soon.

And then it happened.

The door opened and someone flew into the room. She seemed pretty flustered. It was our club president Chitanda, who was busy catching her breath with her head facing down. We were all lost for words by her sudden appearance. After getting her breath back, Chitanda lifted her face at last.

"Hey, Chitanda-san. I thought you'd gone to visit the cemetery?"

She nodded at Satoshi's question.

"Yes. But, there's just something that I feel curious about."

Feel curious about?

I had a bad feeling about this. No, this wasn't just a feeling, it was the experience of knowing something is about to happen. Chitanda's hair was glossed with some sweat while her face was slightly red. And those eyes, which were sparkling, felt so full of life. It was a sign her curiosity was about to explode.

"Chi-chan, what do you mean feeling curious?"

Stop asking! I said to myself as Chitanda turned and prepared to leave the room.

Or that's what I thought she was about to do, but nothing ever escapes her attention. I found my wrist being caught by her hand.

"Oreki-san, let's go. To the Archery Hall, we might still make it."

"What is it, all of a sudden?"

Even though I knew it was pointless, I still protested. But Chitanda shook her head at my request for an explanation.

"It's much faster to see it than to speak about it."

It's useless. Once Chitanda decides on something, it would be more efficient energy-wise to just go along with her whims. Satoshi smiled while Ibara shrugged her shoulders as they looked at us. Giving up, I said, "OK, OK, I'm coming. Since you're grabbing me, it means that, right?"

Chitanda stopped and turned to face me. As her huge eyes stared at me, she slowly replied, "Yes, that's right... I am *very* curious."

9 - Letter to Sarajevo

Dear Sis,

I'm writing to you as there's something I wanted to ask you. I'll just have to trust that the hotel you said you're staying in gets this to you.

Just how much do you know about the Classics Club?

Why did you have me join the Classics Club?

You probably know very well what my lifestyle is like. Yet ever since enrolling in high school, I've been surrounded by Satoshi and other people that you've not yet met. As I watched these people with a completely different lifestyle from me, I somehow felt uncomfortable. It was a feeling you wouldn't feel unless you joined the Classics Club. Had I remained unaffiliated, I probably wouldn't have thought of questioning my own motto.

Could it be that it was your expectation all along for me to waver?

And then there's "Hyouka".

I joined the Classics Club according to your letter from Benares, and looked for the safe in the Biology Room based on your letter from Istanbul. But it doesn't end there. Upon opening that safe, I was placed in a fix in trying to find out the truth concerning Sekitani Jun from 33 years ago.

In short, the students of 33 years ago were living in an active style that was overflowing with energy. The so-called rose-coloured life is probably borne out of this style and the style of "Hyouka". Ever since discovering the truth of that event, I no longer feel as uncomfortable as I did before. While I

wouldn't say my own style is good, at least I now know at least it's not that bad.

Sis, I...

No, this can't be.

This has got to be a bad joke, it's as though you're trying to manipulate my mind. But that's impossible.

Anyway, no need to be too concerned about that. I've written all I could about my present status now. Any further would just be a bother for me.

Have a fun trip.

Regards,
Houtarou

P.S. Thanks for the advice.

Afterword

Greetings, this is Yonezawa Honobu.

About 60% of this novel was pure fiction while the rest was based on historical facts. This story is based on meagre events chronicled in local newspapers.

By the way, for the art of fusing fiction and historical facts, anything that you can come up with a conclusion would be fiction, while historical facts would be the part that you could not do anything about. That's the gist of it. However, for this novel, while basing it on a historical background, I had difficulty in thinking out ideas in how to resolve the fictional part.

In order to finish a story, one must imagine a deflationary spiral. I think *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, which was aired on NHK-E a while ago, does a better job at that.

This book would not have seen the light of day without the assistance of many people. Especially the following:

Yamaguchi-san and Nakai-kun, who provided important hints for me at the eleventh hour. Saitou-san, who urged me to make this story likable and interesting. Tada-san, who has been patiently waiting for me all this time. Akiyama-kun, who has tirelessly warned me not to get too complacent.

I give my sincere thanks to these people. Thank you all. As it's nearly the season for yellowtail sushi, you're cordially invited over to my place to try some.

Secondly.

To everyone from the selection committee who has given this novel a chance, from S-san in charge of the whole thing, to Uesugi-san, who designed the cover illustration (for the first edition), *Hyouka* would not

have been possible without your contribution. You have my deepest gratitude.

By the way, the other day a friend invited me to have some sushi. As the sushi there was befitting of its price, I was glad he offered to drive me there, yet my friend didn't seem to be in a hurry as I was when he drove.

As it's nearly dinnertime, the car park was slowly getting full. To be honest, it was troubling, yet no matter how I rushed my friend, he merely smiled ambiguously as the car moved slowly.

I knew my friend wasn't the sort to tease people, rather he was quite prudent and serious. So I had no idea what's gotten into him that day.

Perhaps I'll reveal the truth in a later opportunity.

Until then, thanks for reading.

Yonezawa Honobu

Translator's notes and references

1. Jump up↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instrumentalism>
2. Jump up↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiho_Jutsu
3. Jump up↑ TL Note: The last few sentences involved a few complicated puns concerning "barren" 不毛 and "dual crops" 二毛作, so I had to modify them a bit for it to make sense in English.
4. Jump up↑ The Eight Dog Chronicles
5. Jump up↑ Tales of Moonlight and Rain
6. Jump up↑ The Great Mirror
7. Jump up↑ TL Note: Modified to fit the pun
8. Jump up↑ Wikipedia
9. Jump up↑ A popular brand of notebooks in Japan - Image, Official Site
10. Jump up↑ TL Note - 狡兎死して走狗烹らる (Koutoshishi soukuniraru) Japanese idiom introduced straight from the same Chinese idiom, referring to victorious emperors ruthlessly eradicating their generals once they had served their purpose of vanquishing the enemy
11. Jump up↑ Hyouka (氷菓) means "frozen treats" such as ice cream, popsicles, etc.
12. Jump up↑ Original term is "mamachari" (ママチャリ), a Japanese-term to refer to bikes mounted with a huge basket in front. The name comes from them generally being used by mothers (mama) to carry their babies around in the basket (chari - a slang for bike).Link
13. Jump up↑ Probably referring to a quote by Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen
14. Jump up↑ Uchimizu
15. Jump up↑ Japanese alcove
16. Jump up↑ TL Note: The pronunciation mistake is obviously all in Japanese and so terms are translated accordingly
17. Jump up↑ TL: Mt Nishiho is part of the Hida Mountains in Nagano Prefecture. Though only the Japanese Wikipedia entry is available for Mt Nishiho itself. As well as the said lightning disaster
18. Jump up↑ TL: All Wikipedia entries concerning Japanese student movement in the 1960s are in Japanese. Googling "Japan student movement" may yield more English results.

19. Jump up↑ TL: Hyouka was published in 2000, before Kosovo declared independence
 20. Jump up↑ TL: Again this part is all liberal translations of things having to do with Japanese words
 21. Jump up↑ TL: Pun changed to make sense in English (beast and feast are not the original words because if the original words were kept, it wouldn't be a pun anymore in English)
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